



A FRAMEWORK
FOR HIGH
QUALITY
PROJECT
BASED
LEARNING



A FRAMEWORK FOR HIGH QUALITY PROJECT BASED LEARNING

More and more educators around the world, both in and out of the classroom, believe that Project Based Learning (PBL) is an important instructional approach that enables students to master academic skills and content knowledge, develop skills necessary for future success, and build the personal agency needed to tackle life's and the world's challenges. All students, no matter where they live or what their background, deserve access to high quality Project Based Learning.

At the present time, however, there is a lack of agreement about what goes into high quality Project Based Learning. Various models and guidelines for PBL have been created by experts and organizations in recent years. These are typically written from the perspective of the teacher. The Framework for High Quality Project Based Learning describes PBL in terms of the student experience and is intended to provide educators everywhere with a shared basis for designing and implementing good projects.

The Framework for High Quality Project Based Learning is based on the accumulated experience, wisdom, and research of hundreds of educators who have graciously shared their ideas and critique. It describes six criteria, each of which must be at least minimally present in a project in order for it to be judged "high quality." The presence of a criterion, however, is only a beginning. Each criterion can be judged in turn as to the quality of its implementation. Projects that are the most memorable, and that have the greatest impact on student learning and development, will be those with the highest quality implementation of each criterion.

The presentation of the HQPBL Framework below is intended to stimulate reflection and conversation about ways that projects can be improved and deepened. The six criteria were chosen as a necessary starting point for providing students access to high quality Project Based Learning because they are an essential baseline, but they are not all-encompassing. Other factors such as classroom and school culture are important for the effectiveness of PBL, as are structural conditions such as adequate time for teachers to learn and plan, and flexible policies for curriculum delivery and assessment. Also important is the fundamental belief that all students can learn, and that their voices should be heard in their own education.

The six criteria are:





INTELLECTUAL CHALLENGE AND ACCOMPLISHMENT

Students learn deeply, think critically, and strive for excellence.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

To what extent do students:

- ▶ investigate challenging problems, questions, and issues over an extended period of time?
- ▶ focus on concepts, knowledge, and skills central to subject areas and intellectual disciplines?
- ▶ experience research-based instruction and support as needed for learning and project success?
- ▶ commit themselves to completing work of the highest quality?

Projects should not just be “fun activities” or “hands-on experiences” requiring minimal intellectual effort. A high quality project requires students to think critically about a complex problem, question, or issue with multiple answers, and then work on that project over the course of days, weeks, and even months. To complete a project successfully, students need to learn important academic content, concepts, and skills. They should also be challenged to produce the highest-quality work possible and guided and supported as they try to do so.



AUTHENTICITY

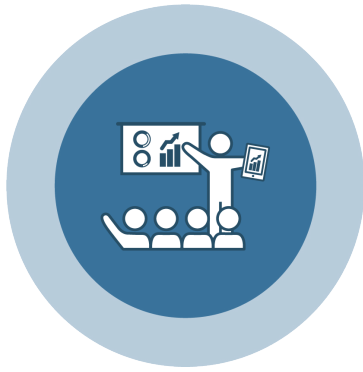
Students work on projects that are meaningful and relevant to their culture, their lives, and their future.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

To what extent do students:

- ▶ engage in work that makes an impact on or otherwise connects to the world beyond school, and to their personal interests and concerns?
- ▶ use the tools, techniques, and/or digital technologies employed in the world beyond school?
- ▶ make choices regarding project topics, activities, and/or products?

To motivate students and show them the relevance of what they are learning in school, projects should be experienced as “real.” A high quality project reflects what happens in the world outside of school. It uses the tools, techniques, and technology found there. It can make an impact on other people and communities, and it can connect to the interests and concerns of young people. Students’ voices should be heard in a project, and they should be able to make choices about their work.



PUBLIC PRODUCT

Students' work is publicly displayed, discussed, and critiqued.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

To what extent do students:

- ▶ share their work-in-progress with peers, teachers, and others for feedback?
- ▶ exhibit their work and describe their learning to peers and people beyond the classroom?
- ▶ receive feedback and/or engage in dialogue with their audiences?

In traditional schooling, most learning occurs in a private relationship between a teacher and learner; students complete work individually and show it only to the teacher. In a high quality project, students make their work public by sharing it not only with the teacher but also with each other, experts, and other people beyond the classroom. This occurs both during a project, as part of the product development and formative assessment process and at its conclusion, when the product is shared and discussed with an audience. This public process and final presentation encourages students to improve the quality of their work and demonstrates what students know and can do.



COLLABORATION

Students collaborate with other students in person or online and/or receive guidance from adult mentors and experts.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

To what extent do students:

- ▶ work in teams to complete complex tasks?
- ▶ learn to become effective team members and leaders?
- ▶ learn how to work with adult mentors, experts, community members, businesses, and organizations?

Projects may be done as an individual activity, but in today's world – and workplace -- it is important to learn the skill of collaboration. In high quality PBL, some project work should be done as a team. This does not mean simply dividing up project tasks, completing them individually, then putting it all together at the end with no synthesis or discussion. When students truly collaborate, they are contributing individual voices, talents, and skills to a shared piece of work, while respecting the contributions of others. In some projects, students also collaborate online with students in other schools, and work with adult experts, community members, and organizations.



PROJECT MANAGEMENT

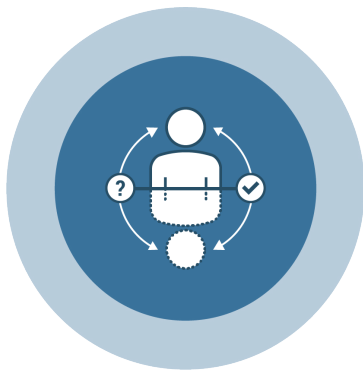
Students use a project management process that enables them to proceed effectively from project initiation to completion.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

To what extent do students:

- ▶ manage themselves and their teams efficiently and effectively throughout a multi-step project?
- ▶ learn to use project management processes, tools, and strategies?
- ▶ use the perspectives and processes of design thinking, as appropriate?

Whether it's on the job or in their personal lives, people work on projects, and it helps to know how to manage time, tasks, and resources efficiently. In high quality PBL, students learn and make use of project management processes, tools, and strategies similar to those used in the world beyond school. Students may also follow the steps of design thinking as they manage projects.



REFLECTION

Students reflect on their work and their learning throughout the project.

GUIDING QUESTIONS

To what extent do students:

- ▶ learn to assess and suggest improvements in their own and other students' work?
- ▶ reflect on, write about, and discuss the academic content, concepts, and success skills they are learning?
- ▶ use reflection as a tool to increase their own personal agency?

Learning is reinforced by reflecting on what we know and do. In a high quality project, students learn to assess the quality of their work and think about how to make it better. They pause regularly—not just at the end of the project, but throughout the process—to think about what they are doing and learning. By reflecting on what they have accomplished, students retain project content and skills longer, develop a greater sense of control over their own education, and build confidence in themselves.



HQPBL FRAMEWORK: COMMITMENT STATEMENTS

As teachers, school and system leaders, teacher educators, educational policy leaders and journalists, and curriculum and support providers, we endorse the Framework for High Quality Project Based Learning described above, and commit to including all six criteria in projects we create, conduct, or encourage.

Teachers

I commit to implementing projects that challenge, engage, and support students as described by the six HQPBL criteria.

School and School System Leaders

I commit to building the capacity and creating the conditions necessary for educators to implement High Quality Project Based Learning as described by the six HQPBL criteria.

Teacher Education Leaders

I commit to making sure that educators develop the capacity to implement High Quality Project Based Learning as described by the six HQPBL criteria.

Educational Policy Leaders and Journalists

I commit to helping educators and the public understand the nature and importance of the six HQPBL criteria, and their role in student learning and development.

Curriculum and Support Providers

I commit to creating and providing products and services to educators that will help them implement High Quality Project Based Learning as described by the six HQPBL criteria.

The High Quality Project Based Learning campaign is supported by the Project Management Institute Educational Foundation and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The Buck Institute for Education facilitated the development of the Framework for HQPBL.