

Tips for Teachers Starting PBL

Time:

- Ensure that the project and assessment of it forms part of the syllabus.
- Avoid scheduling projects at the same time as major tests and exams.
- Avoid having learners involved in major projects in different learning areas at the same time.
- Arrange the school day differently so that learners have large blocks of time to work on projects.
- Plan for extra time so that there is room to cope with the unexpected.
- Have other activities planned so that you can give learners a break from the project if they get bored.
- Be prepared to be flexible about deadlines if learners are genuinely battling to complete work.

Getting Started:

- Prepare learners for the project by talking about it well in advance.
- Provide a rubric which makes it clear what is required of them, e.g.

	4	3	2	1
Working as a group, learners are able to find and reference Internet information.	Group finds plenty of useful, relevant information from reliable sources and references them correctly.	Group finds some useful, relevant information from sources which are not clearly reliable, and references them partially.	Group finds a small amount of useful, relevant information from questionable sources, and references the information inadequately.	Groups finds hardly any information and does not make any attempt to reference it.

- Make the kinds of assessment and criteria clear to learners at the start of the project.
- Where possible, involve the learners in drawing up the criteria.
- Work to a research plan, an overview that provides guidance as to what steps are required, and what information is needed. Involve learners in drawing up this research plan.
- Build in checkpoints where you can see how a group is progressing with the project, so that they can get back on track if they are not doing what is required.

Self Management:

- Involve the learners in the design of the project, in order to get them to buy in from the beginning.
- Teach them to make decisions about the project, rather than making decisions for them.
- Develop time management skills, study skills and project management skills by actively teaching the learners these.
- Establish high standards by showing the learners professional quality work, as well as good learner work. Possibly develop your own sample project.
- Use scaffolding, supportive tools and explanations, which will help the learners see how to achieve the high standards you set.

Group Work:

- Use heterogeneous groups, by mixing learners of different abilities, different skills, and different strengths

and weaknesses, depending on the project. If they need to work a lot out of school, using groups of friends can work well (as long as you ensure that the 'unpopular' learners get incorporated into groups).

- Use a jigsaw design: have **expert groups** which investigate a particular aspect of the project, and then report back to **home groups** which depend on the expert information from all group members.
- Have realistic consequences for not contributing to the group, e.g. allow a group to fire a member after two warnings.
- Make exercises aimed at understanding group dynamics a part of the project process.
- If a group loses direction, discuss with them why they have lost focus, and try to get them to accept responsibility for making the group work.
- In the course of the project, have group members evaluate each other's contribution so that non-contributors have a chance to get involved before it is too late.
- Monitor the progress of groups by meeting regularly with each group, and keeping a record of the various milestones for the project. A chart on the classroom wall recording each group's progress can aid motivation.

Communication:

- Educators involved in the project need to meet regularly and frequently to coordinate activities and share ideas.
- Educators in the school who are not part of the project team need to be informed about the project, and need to be given a chance to raise issues. This will facilitate planning around possible conflicts with other learning areas. Prepare colleagues for a different kind of classroom which might seem noisy and chaotic if the school tends to be traditional.

Adapted from: Mergendoller, J.R. & Thomas, J.W., *Managing Project Based Learning: Principles from the Field*.