



Assessing Student Work with Project-Based Learning

What is the function of assessment in project-based learning (PBL)?

Below is the beginning of a list of roles assessment plays in the classroom. Every teacher will be able to add to this list! Please [email your comments and suggestions](#) to be added to this list.

- **Assessment helps teachers develop more complex relationships with their students** by providing concrete pieces of work for students and teachers to discuss, as well as opportunities for formal and informal conversations about the work. Similarly, students work closely with each other providing and receiving feedback on their projects; and often mentors, parents, and community members will be involved with the project development or have an interest in the finished product.
- **Assessment helps students answer the questions "Am I getting it?" and "How am I doing?"** Early and frequent feedback from the teacher, peers, and mentors will also provide students with the practice and the knowledge to better assess themselves and find answers to these questions.
- **Assessment can help make content connections clear.** [Journals](#) and [Design/Idea Books](#) can be used by teachers to prompt students to make connections between their research and designs and the relevant subject matter. Teachers and students can both use such activities to take note of concepts and connections to carry forward to the next stage or activity.
- **Assessment engages students directly in the evaluation of their own work.** Student reflections should be more than just commentary on what the students have done--they should be used by students to highlight what they have learned, explain important decisions they have made, and articulate plans for incorporating feedback and moving forward.
- **Assessment helps teachers plan their next steps.** By documenting and reviewing student progress, eliciting answers to specific questions, and checking for conceptual understanding, teachers gain insights into what the students are learning and what needs to be addressed before moving on.
- **Assessment helps students plan their projects.** Class presentations, design reviews, conversations with teachers and group members, and teacher responses to journal and design/idea book entries, all give students valuable feedback to help them plan their next step.
- *This space for your ideas!*

What makes assessment "authentic"?

Authentic assessment is one of the components of project-based learning, but what does this mean?

- Assessment activities not only capture student understanding of concepts and subject matter, but they also **document and promote the development of "real world" skills** which students need outside the classroom and beyond the school environment. For example, teachers may look for evidence of good collaboration skills, the ability to solve complex problems and make thoughtful decisions, the ability to

- give effective and articulate presentations, etc.
- Assessments **reflect student learning over time**, and not just student performance on a piece of work or a final exam. The student's progress is documented throughout his/her work on a project providing the teacher with examples of growth and learning.
- In PBL, assessment **takes place in a context familiar to the student**. Assessment is embedded in everyday activities that are familiar to all students--at the same time assessment helps to extend everyday activities and foster learning.
- **Assessment standards are well known** to the students. Some classes will create rubrics for evaluating student work thus making students co-creators of their own evaluation criteria. Other classes will use external criteria, but it will be explained to the students, and they will use the same criteria the teacher and outside evaluators use to assess their own and each other's work.
- Assessment helps **build real mastery of a subject** by allowing students to revise their work and incorporate new understandings and constructive feedback. Assessment activities also require students to articulate and explain subject matter, their decisions, their initiative, etc. to those doing the assessing.
- Authentic assessment also **requires an authentic audience**. This can be classmates, a particular group for whom the project was designed, a mentor, adults or students who have an interest in the project subject, or members of the community (including potential employers, parents, and educators) who have an interest in what the student is learning.
- *This space for your ideas!*

How do teachers plan their assessments?

Assessment planning is a natural part of all teachers' work. Below are several ideas about assessment planning with PBL. While reading them, try listing ways you already include these ideas in your assessment plans. If you leave some bullet points blank, keep the ideas in mind and write them down as you work through your plans.

- Learning is going on all the time; one of the goals of assessment is to organize learning so that it is visible and can be documented.
- Assessment planning involves identifying what assessment activity is most appropriate in a particular situation and deciding what to look for while observing, reading, or participating in that activity.
- Assessment planning involves identifying what is valuable to the teacher, the school, this particular group of students, the state and region (as expressed in frameworks and standards), the parents, and other members of the community.
- Assessments should come in multiple forms. Assessment activities need to be diverse enough to include all students regardless of their backgrounds and skills, yet specific enough to provide relevant and meaningful feedback to all involved. It may help to think about triangulation:
 - multiple assessors--such as the students themselves, peers, the teacher, and mentors;
 - multiple units of assessment--such as individual students, groups, the whole class; and
 - multiple formats--such as written work (formal assignments and informal journal entries), observations (of group activities and individual work), presentations, informal discussions and questions, project designs, and the final media product.
- *This space for your ideas!*