

# Coaching Teachers to Successfully Implement PBL

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## **Background That Led to Your Inquiry:**

The inquiry that led me to want to research and implement PBL was that classrooms need high engagement in order to successfully learn skills and standards. This method of teaching spoke to me during my studies in graduate school because studies have shown growth in engagement in schools using PBL. In my own classroom teaching experience and observing several classrooms too many teachers are using teacher centered instruction with sit and get practices. Project based learning creates critical thinking and problem solving skills for students. The higher order thinking from students pushes them to think outside of the box and become owners of logical and reasoning problem solving skills that will help them in their educational career and workforce career.

The past traditional way of using projects in learning were presenting content with students doing activities or taking quizzes and the project coming at the very end of the unit as an assessment tool. The way in which PBL creates a project is from the beginning to the end with culminating activities, instruction, and benchmarks throughout the unit. At the end of the unit, there is a presentation of the unit project to a community member or other school members so the students can showcase their learning. After the presentation the students are always asked to reflect on their learning through the project. The project is a part of the whole unit and not just an assessment tool at the end of a unit.

The Indiana State Board of Education is implementing graduation pathways. What this means is there are 3 main paths students can take to graduate: 1) High School Diploma, 2) Learn and Demonstrate Employability Skills, and 3) Post Secondary-Ready Competencies. Under Learn and Demonstrate Employability Skills is the choice of using project based learning in order to obtain credits for graduation. Students will be well equipped in learning with the PBL method starting in elementary school and continuing through high school. The data culture survey showed that the lowest mean was in learning partnership. My goal in implementing PBL is to allow parent, teacher, and student input into what and how they are learning about standards, current events, and real world problems. This will allow more voice and choice from the students and pull in community members as resources. The plan is to present to other students, parents, and community members. This model will strengthen the learning partnership in my building and hopefully continue through their high school careers.

Therefore, the purpose of my action research was to

- Increase student engagement
- Incorporate student voice and choice
- Increase critical thinking and problem solving skills in students
- Motivate teachers to be inspired by student input

## **Statement of Your Wondering:**

How can I as the instructional leader give teachers the tools and teaching framework needed in order to implement Project Based Learning?

## **Methods/Procedures:**

To gain insights into my wondering, I began by researching websites on PBL. The Edutopia website was very helpful (<https://www.edutopia.org/project-based-learning> (Edutopia, Project Based Learning. 2018)). I researched schools in Indiana that implemented a PBL model in their building and reached out to principals for discussions and tours. After discussions with Principal Brett Findley, at CSA Lincoln Academy, in Columbus he led me to the book called PBL in the Elementary Grades. We used PBL in the Elementary Grades (Hallermann, Larmer, & Mergendoller, 2016) to guide us in starting our journey with PBL through a book study.

The first step in introducing PBL that I took was sending teachers videos and articles weekly. I started having discussions with teachers through email and meetings about the methodology of the teaching instruction. There was collaboration at staff meetings early on whether or not we wanted to move forward with PBL. The majority consensus was to move forward with PBL. Grade levels 1 & 2 piloted PBL with the expectation of doing 1 the first semester and 2 PBL units the 2nd semester. I purchased a PBL website in order to help jump start planning for PBL units. Here is the website that I purchased <http://pblproject.com/Home.aspx>. The next step that I took was reaching out again to Principal Brett Findley, at CSA Lincoln Academy, for strategies on starting PBL in a building. Mr. Findley was very helpful with sharing his knowledge and resources with PBL. One very beneficial part of reaching out to Mr. Findley was that he explained to me that his school hosts school tours. Therefore, we set up a tour for early December for 3 teachers piloting PBL and myself to visit and take the school tour focusing on project based learning. By the end of the following school year, I was able to send all of the teachers K-4 to a CSA Lincoln school tour and visit.

At the end of year 1 of grades 1 & 2 piloting PBL, we found that PBL increased engagement for students, more collaboration amongst students and teachers, teachers felt excited about teaching again, students were asking and answering higher order thinking questions, more reflection, and students had more voice and choice. The teachers and I discussed the PBL units and timeliness within the classroom and decided that each grade level will be required to do at least 1 PBL project per each of the 4, 9 weeks.

A component of PBL that we added was passions class. Each teacher filled out a survey form telling me an interest they have that they want to teach to students. I took that information and created a survey for students to put them into passion classes. Passion classes are 30 minutes long every other Friday. I sent out a survey to teachers asking what was the most beneficial information to them in learning about PBL in order to reflect on my administrative practices. I held grade level meetings monthly to discuss use of driving questions, the project planner, and using rubrics to grade PBL projects.

One of the first grade teachers did a project making pet rocks and flower pens to raise money for our local Morgan County Humane Society. The driving question was "How can we as first grade students at Paragon Elementary help to provide the needs of the animals at the Morgan County Humane Society?"

Allowing student and staff members to take part in the 1st grade project stemmed interest in PBL from both the staff members, students, and parents. I collected data throughout this 4 week project by taking pictures and talking to students in 1st grade taking part in the Morgan County Humane Society project.

Throughout this time, I met with teachers to discuss PBL through staff meetings and grade level meetings to collect feedback. I have attended and set up tours at CSA Lincoln Academy. I provided staff with articles and videos to learn more about PBL and offered professional development training opportunities from outside sources. I created the passions spreadsheet and templates for town hall meetings on the announcements. I collected pictures and student work that showed collaboration and problem solving. I organized my data into groups to reflect what my role as a coach in implementing PBL was and where I would like to go.

### **Stating Your Learning and Supporting it with Data:**

As a result of analyzing my data important things I learned include:

Through my research of a project based learning survey to the teachers, teachers were able to allow students voice and choice in their own learning. The students were collaborating to solve problems and make discoveries over their standardized topic. Students showing ownership in their learning led to an increase in engagement and collaboration.

“Project Based Learning has helped my students develop a sense of community and they are very enthusiastic about our projects. These projects have been student-driven and I am more of a guide to assist them when necessary. It has been interesting to see the different roles students take on....sometimes a student I thought would just “go with the flow” emerges as a leader. The projects they have created have been high-quality work.” -Angie Smethurst

“I feel that every child gets a chance to shine, especially in different areas that aren’t the normal curriculum areas. I find students are more engaged overall, and are in charge of their own learning versus me telling them what to do.” -Stephanie Kern

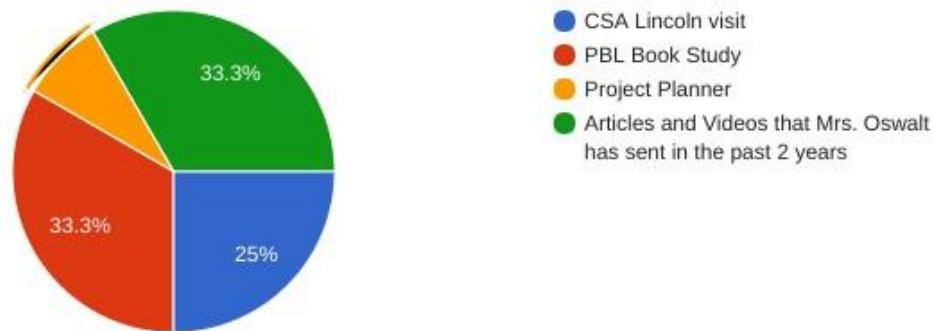
“I’ve enjoyed it as well as the students. They do learn and enjoy the different methods of learning through PBL.” -Michelle Baker

In grade level meetings, teachers voiced that they saw less discipline during PBL units and felt they were happier with this style of teaching.

In my efforts of coaching teachers to implement PBL in their classrooms, teachers thought that the articles and videos and the PBL book study were the most helpful in learning how to begin teaching lessons based on project based learning.

## What teaching tool has helped you implement PBL in the classroom the most thus far?

12 responses



### Providing Concluding Thoughts:

As I worked through the AR Project, what I learned about myself as the administrator is it takes time to get all teachers to buy into a teaching strategy. Teachers are reluctant to change so give the new teaching method time to sell itself. I coached the teachers to learn about PBL with articles, videos, a book study, and a school tour. What I found was using teacher leaders to start teaching PBL and work closely with me on the direction we want PBL to take our school helped bring in the other teachers.

One big take-away for me with implementing PBL was that it was hard to put my finger on data as far as numbers and the effects on grades and attendance. I will continue to work on ways in which I can track how PBL has had an effect on grades and attendance. PBL has strengthened the culture and environment in the building by the sense of community molded by Project Based Learning.

As I reflect on the AR Project and plan ahead for the future, I plan on holding parent meetings each nine weeks in order to keep them informed about PBL. I plan on allowing the parents to have voice in our school-wide project that we will do for the entire year. One thing that I would have done differently from the beginning would be to set up a Project Based Learning Action Plan. I am currently working on the action plan to have a more direct expectation for teachers and the direction we are going with PBL. During the teacher common planning time, I plan on continuing grade level meetings and plan on sharing professional development during that time and through Google Classroom.

### References:

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