

Fine-Tuning Your PBL Projects

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In project-based learning, students achieve better results when they receive feedback and have time to make improvements in their final products or solutions. The same is true for PBL teachers. Critique and revision will help you improve projects so that your students experience high-quality learning from start to finish.

If you are new to PBL, you may be wondering how to go about critiquing your own projects. Which questions should you consider? What part of your project needs fine-tuning? How might you integrate technology tools that could transform learning for your students?

After exploring these questions with educators at [ISTE20 Live](#) and hearing the wisdom generated by our participants, we are eager to keep this conversation going.

Three filters for fine-tuning

When it comes to fine-tuning PBL, we suggest taking a closer look at your projects through three filters: How can you amplify *inquiry*, ensure *equity* and deepen *literacy* for your students? All three are important considerations for designing high-quality learning that engages all your students. You can enhance each one by thoughtful technology integration to support your learners.

Inquiry

Inquiry is what drives student-centered learning in PBL. Fine-tuning for inquiry means finding ways to spark curiosity, connect to students' interests and encourage questions that will take students to deeper learning. For example, after sharing a provocative video and driving question to launch a project, you could use [Padlet](#) to capture students' need-to-know questions and ensure that everyone has a voice.

Equity

Equity means ensuring that all students will be successful in PBL. Fine-tuning for equity means setting high expectations for all and providing resources — and removing barriers — to enable student success. For example, you could have students interview experts, either in person or virtually (using [Zoom](#), [Google Meet](#), [Microsoft Teams](#) or another video conferencing tool), making sure that experts are relatable role models who reflect students' culture and experiences.

Literacy

Literacy enables students to make meaning by engaging with content and ideas through speaking, listening, reading and writing. Fine-tuning for literacy means providing tools and scaffolds for students to engage deeply with content. For example, students could produce podcasts that would challenge them to communicate fluently.

Four stages of learning

Most projects follow a similar path, even though they can vary widely when it comes to learning goals and complexity.

1. PBL typically starts with a launch event to spark curiosity and generate questions.
2. With the teacher's guidance, students build understanding and skills through a variety of learning activities, investigations and resources.
3. Students apply their learning to create a product or solution (and make improvements with critique and revision).
4. Students share evidence of their learning with a public audience.

If you look carefully at each stage of learning, you'll find opportunities to fine-tune for equity, inquiry and literacy. Our infographic describes the learning goals for each phase and suggests reflection questions for fine-tuning your projects using these three lenses.

Crowdsourcing tools

If the reflection questions have helped you recognize areas for improvement in your next project, think about how and when to integrate technology tools as part of your solution. Don't be overwhelmed by the abundance of options. And don't give up on low-tech tools and

strategies — they have a place in PBL, too! Instead, keep your focus on the specific learning goals and challenges at each stage in your project.

For example, to build literacy skills in a project that introduces students to unfamiliar vocabulary, you could start with a simple word wall. To help students with different literacy skills engage with content, you might integrate a tool like [Newsela](#) or [Immersive Reader](#). To support student writers, you could combine writer's workshop strategies with collaborative documents (such as [Google docs](#)) for peer feedback and editing.

To jumpstart your thinking about more tools to integrate in PBL, take a look at the [document that participants crowdsourced at ISTE](#). Better yet, add your own ideas for digital tools to spark inquiry, ensure equity and deepen literacy in PBL.

Don't miss these ISTE Live session presented by Suzie Boss: [Creating Engaged Citizens With Real-World Project-Based Learning](#) and [Digital Age PBL for All Learners, Online or In Person](#). [Register today!](#)

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