

Project Versus Activity-Based Teaching Strategies

Remember that projects are not a new instructional idea. However, well-designed projects that meet PBL criteria differ from activities or even projects that have been traditional in the classroom.

Example Themes	Activity-Based Instruction	Project-Based Learning	Differences between the Two Instructional Strategies
Civil War Battles	Take a field trip to Gettysburg. Write a report on the experience	Investigate the question "How could wars be more humane?" Use Gettysburg as an example of a high casualty battle, comparing it to other battles. Complete a portfolio, including an essay and a literary response journal, then conclude with a debate.	Students investigate an overall challenging question. District activities are conducted in the context of the challenge. No single activity is likely to be sufficient for responding to the challenge.
Sound Pollution	Listen to different sounds. Make a graph. Identify features of common sounds that are disturbing to the ear.	Identify five sound pollution problems in the community. Form a task force to investigate the problems and devise technically feasible solutions for each.	Although the activity-based tasks are useful for instruction, the tasks themselves may not be provocative. The project-based approach, in contrast, defines an overarching challenge and embeds these tasks (listening, graphing, identifying features) in a meaningful community project.
Ancient Architecture	Make posters depicting the architecture of ancient Egypt	Complete a case study on the pyramids using the question "How were the pyramids built?" to address five controversial issues: source of the design, source of materials, time to completion, method of transportation of materials, and contents of the chambers.	The project addresses the fundamental principles and issues. The project has an overarching question that engages students' critical thinking as well as their creativity. The project reflects current historical mysteries and investigations.
Geometry	Observe and measure various school buildings and record data.	Design a "School of the Future" with scale drawings and models, taking into account the site and anticipated needs. Present plan to an audience of school officials or community experts.	This complex project goes beyond simply "getting students out of their seats." It requires application of concepts and defense of choices made.