



SCHOOL21



Intellectual
Challenge and
Accomplishment



Authenticity



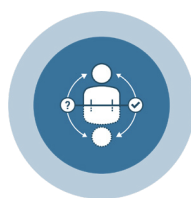
Public
Product



Collaboration



Project
Management



Reflection

The [Framework for High Quality Project Based Learning \(HQPBL\)](#) describes PBL in terms of the student experience. It describes six criteria, each of which must be at least minimally present in a project in order for it to be judged “high quality.” The six criteria were chosen as a necessary starting point for providing students access to HQPBL because they are an essential baseline, but they are not all-encompassing.

Projects that are the most memorable, and that have the greatest impact on student learning and development, will be those with the highest quality implementation of each criterion. The case study that follows highlights the six criteria and is intended to provide readers with a real-world example of HQPBL.

For more information and resources, visit the HQPBL [School21](#) page:





Students created an on-going campaign where they interviewed community members about local human rights issues

If you're wondering what the school of the future looks like, you may have to look no further than London's Stratford neighborhood.

School21 is far from a typical K-12 school, and students' experiences reflect more real-world interactions than would ever be seen in traditional pedagogical models. From an interpersonal perspective, it is a small learning community where everyone knows one another. From an operational perspective, it is a place where students help design their own learning spaces.



The modern facade of School21

21st Century Learning by Design

This is a place where students are empowered to take their education by the reins; a school where parents and the community are not only welcome, but encouraged to participate; a facility led by educators who consider its broader role in society both today and in the years to come.

It's a free school that opened as part of the School21 Trust, and one with a weighty responsibility: serving the needs of a community that includes a significant proportion of pupils living in poverty, with special needs, or those to whom English is a second language.



School21 views these differences as strengths and assets, incorporating students’ backgrounds and perspectives in order to enhance learning—so much so that they have built an impressive track record over the past five years in terms of student success. Students who arrive performing well below the United Kingdom’s national average make progress that is among the highest in the country.

Its three founders—Peter Hyman, Oli de Botton, and Ed Fidoie—came together with a shared belief that education required a different approach to successfully prepare young people to thrive in college, career, and life. Focusing on the head (academic success), heart (character and well-being), and hand (generating ideas, problem solving, and making a difference) has served as a core value and ethos that has driven all aspects of their curriculum development. Within these efforts, high quality Project Based Learning experiences have played a pivotal role.

Developing the Whole Student

Project Based Learning is one of the school’s three main focuses, alongside oracy (public speaking) and wellbeing, in order to develop students holistically. Project Based Learning presents itself as an effective teaching strategy to deliver on this vision.

Through high quality PBL (HQPBL) experiences, students develop robust and deep subject knowledge that is cross-curricular in nature and applied to real problems and challenges.

In addition to content knowledge, they also gain critical skills in working collaboratively, meaningful communication and effective problem-solving strategies—soft skills that are highly desirable traits sought by employers.

“In a world where many of the career options available to the children we currently teach may not even exist yet, it is these important skills acquired through Project Based Learning that set them up to be successful in life beyond school.”

— Anna Kyrk, Head of curriculum development and Project Based Learning, School21

Anna Kyrk, head of the school’s curriculum development and Project Based Learning, leads School21’s Project Based Learning efforts. She notes that, naturally, this looks different depending upon the students’ grade levels.

- ▶ **At the primary level** (ages four to nine), students work on projects most afternoons of the week, after a morning storytelling and literacy session and math lesson. Often, the focus of the literacy sessions mirrors their current project, so the first and last sessions in the day can both involve building on learning critical to the project.
- ▶ **In the middle school** (ages 10 to 13), projects involve mixed-age teams coming together, off timetable for a whole day, once a week. Currently, two projects run simultaneously: one with a STEM focus, the other with an Art/History focus. After approximately 6-8 weeks, the length of our half-terms, the groups swap so that all children complete all projects.
- ▶ **In the secondary school** (ages 14 to 18), projects are multidisciplinary and are formed either within a single department or via collaboration between two departments. The former might take place in a biological class, where students create a public service announcement about bacterial resistance. The latter approach could involve music and science, for example, or history and drama. Each term, the mix of subjects changes—and projects also may take place in foundation subjects like math and English. What’s more, students take part in the Real World Learning Program when they get to Year 10, where the school’s partnership team places students in actual work environments. In these scenarios, students solve real-life problems relevant to their ‘employer’.

Real-world project: One recent secondary school example involved foundation subjects—English and math—and had secondary students teaming up to solve a real-life problem.

They researched and protested a proposal to build a cement plant on part of the grounds used for the 2012 London Olympics, located very close to the school.

The result? The students’ campaign was successful in subsequently blocking further development—and their efforts caught the attention of local media as well.

The school’s [Real World Learning Project](#) (RWLP) provides authentic placements in workplaces, in which the students solve real problems. Current placements include a local radio station, where students are broadcasting their own show, and a group working with HSBC Bank to reimagine banking for young people. The dedicated RWLP team reaches out and develops networks of employers who offer such opportunities to the school’s Year 10 students. In spring 2018, they will have an exhibition in which they will share their learning.

Those who have been working with a variety of organizations for half a day each week since early September 2017 will present their real-world experiences to classmates, parents, teachers, and community members. “This includes discussing the impact they have made during their placements, how they have grown and developed during this time, and most importantly revealing whether they would be hired or fired,” Kyrk said.

Authenticity: A Delicious Development

A primary school project that centered on developing an authentic experience for its audience was “*How can we make our restaurant rule?*” Three of the school’s Year 3 classes (8- and 9-year-olds) selected different cuisines and themes around which to base their restaurants: an Italian trattoria, a 1950’s American diner, and a Pan-Asian fusion restaurant.

Kyrk explained that they visited examples of these restaurants in the real world, testing the food, assessing the decor and management systems, and interviewing the staff. They conducted market research in the local community by interviewing on the street to help in the development of menu choices and sourced ingredients at local grocery stores, learning about budgets, projected profits, and costs.



Year 3 students ready to serve patrons at Dinestein’s, the American diner they developed from inception to completion

The experience didn’t stop there. Students designed menus for their restaurants and drafted, critiqued, and redrafted their food options. A professional waiter offered master classes in high quality service techniques, and the children met with app designers to understand how the effectiveness and quality of their restaurants would be rated by patrons. Then, for three nights the classes opened their restaurants and served a mixed audience of the professionals they had met as well as teachers and other members of the school community, who rated their experience using the apps the pupils had commissioned. ([Check out this Edutopia video](#) for more examples of School21 projects from its secondary students.)

Intellectual Challenges: Empowering Advanced Concepts

Working backwards from outcomes has produced some very interesting and perhaps unexpectedly advanced knowledge from students. For example, children in Year 3 (age eight) worked on a science and design technology project that focused on the question “How can we bring our toys to life?” which explored electricity and circuitry as well as 3D toy design. As part of the project, they consulted with a designer about their toys and applied their understanding of circuits to make their creations light up, move, or make noise. These were presented at the school’s Exhibition of Beautiful Work, with the children showcasing their projects as scientists and designers.



An understanding of circuitry, electricity, and 3D toy design enabled students to bring their ideas for playtime to life

A project of this nature demonstrates a deeper understanding of significant content, as the U.K.’s national curriculum stipulates that electricity be covered only the following year (at age nine), and then built upon in year 6 (age 11). In contrast, School21’s Year 3 children (age eight) were able to access this content through their toy project, in addition to examining various concepts covered in the first years of secondary education. They took a test designed for the Year 6 SATs (the end of year national tests) on electricity, and all passed—most with a higher grade.

“To listen to kids talk about flows of electrons and things you wouldn’t expect from someone so small was incredible,” Kyrk said. “The way they were able to adeptly answer questions about electricity and circuitry as a result of the project showed just how deeply they were able to engage with the content.”

Public Production: Embracing the Stage

Imagine being a ten-year-old whose narrative is critiqued by a professional storyteller. At School21, this actually happens. In fact, students and teachers are currently working on a whole school project that incorporates professional learning for the staff. The project centers on the legendary bard, Shakespeare. The school's younger students have a different story they're learning, which reflects their linguistic and developmental levels.

The other students are putting on a huge Shakespearean performance in (where else?) an iconic chapel in London with a capacity of 1,000. The performance is open to the public, and tickets are on sale. To draw in as large an audience as possible, the school has placed advertisements promoting it. Students are often responsible for management of the entire planning, process, and facilitation of performances—right down to handling program design and ticket distribution.

Kyrk notes that the project is helping to develop students' confidence, as it heightens learning in ways students do not ordinarily experience in typical schools.



Students lead a performance in a neighborhood venue brimming with history

The traditional approach to publicly displaying one's work might involve a display board for projects, a parents' night, or a simple internal review from the teacher of the class. At School21, projects aren't just critiqued; they're designed for a purpose, which raises the stakes from the very beginning. Kyrk emphasized that this approach increases kids' engagement exponentially.

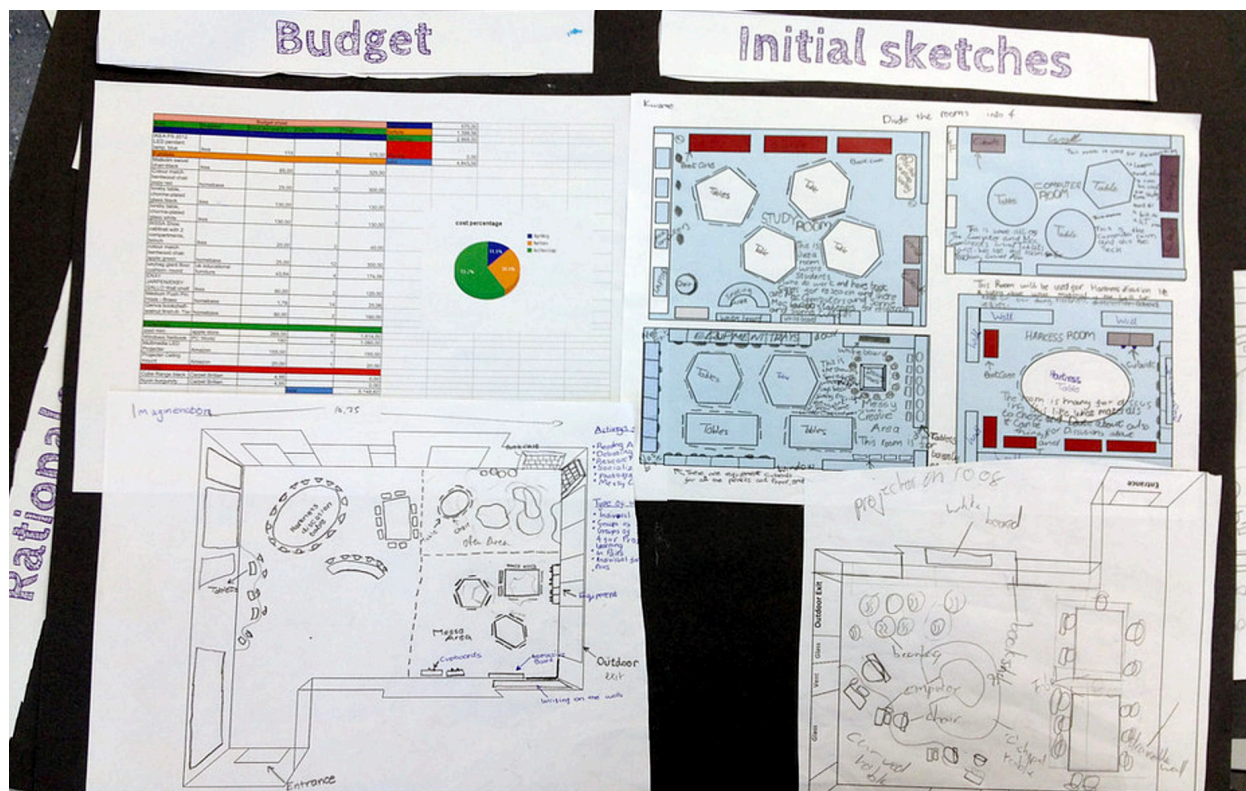
Transformational Teaching & Learning

Project Based Learning hasn't only been a transformational experience for the students, however.

"I wouldn't go back to traditional teaching," Kyrk said. "More than deepening understanding, Project Based Learning helps students to develop the ability to work productively and be inquisitive and excited about learning. They follow lines of inquiry. It inherently supports social and emotional learning through its collaborative nature. Our children work independently, but we have critiquing drafts built in where work can be interactive and solicit and offer feedback that is kind, specific and helpful."

Not to be dismissed is the prominent role that parents play in the equation, a move that was deliberate from the school's beginning. Project Based Learning had been completely untested when the first cohort came through School21; initially, some parents were skeptical of its effectiveness. They've been involved as the school has grown, and bear witness to their students' learning journeys and the impact of high quality PBL.

"Now that we're more established and have evidence to back up this approach, we aren't just open about outcomes and logistics—we want parents to come in and be involved, and we have a huge exhibition of the projects and outcomes," Kyrk said. "It is most definitely participatory for parents, as they can see firsthand the impact of our teaching methods on their children. Better yet, our relationship with the community is growing stronger every year."



Students at School21 learn how to manage projects on their own



A School21 student sharing her project with a local community member

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@HQPBL #HQPBL



This case study was produced by [Getting Smart](#) as part of the High Quality Project Based Learning campaign. The goal of the campaign is to identify what high quality PBL student experiences look like and work to ensure all students have access to this type of learning. The campaign is supported by Project Management Institute Educational Foundation (PMIEF) and the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and sponsored by the Buck Institute for Education.