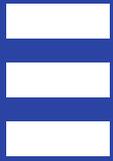




PBL IN ACTION

Riverwalk Academy's third grade teachers enhanced the project-based learning experience for students.

KAYLA BUMGARNER



What is Project-Based Learning?

Project-based learning is a student-centered teaching method that allows students to work on investigating the answer to a complex and authentic question, challenge, or problem. Knowledge retention and attitudes toward learning can increase with high-quality PBL. State standards are incorporated into each project, which prevents students from feeling as if they are "spoon fed" facts to simply memorize.

PBL allows students to have control over their own learning and investigate topics of interest. The facilitators (teachers) assist in guiding students to ensure they are on task and to push for further investigation. Full PBL implementation provides students with excitement and an eagerness to learn.

Winthrop University states "The SC Department of Education is now providing Project-Based Learning teacher licensure endorsement. Winthrop is one of the first institutions of higher education in the nation to provide this endorsement to teacher educators." Terra Carney, Mandy DeLangie, and Lara Jessee, three teachers at Riverwalk Academy completed this licensure endorsement.

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Ms. Carney
Third Grade Teacher
"They are asking questions, finding answers, and asking more questions until they reach full understanding of a topic"
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Project-Based Learning In Action

After specialized training at Winthrop University, Riverwalk Academy's third grade teachers enhanced the project-based learning experience for students. For these teachers, the specialized training at Winthrop University began in the summer, and it involved large amounts of reading and self-reflection as teachers.

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Ms. McCray
Elementary Principal

"The students are more engaged and they are excited about taking ownership of their learning"

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Following the completion of the training, teachers Terra Carney, Mandy DeLangie, and Lara Jessee began implementing the PBL technique in their classrooms. They began on a small scale after the first few weeks of school. Together they have created a system that allows students to take control of their own learning. In the third grade classes, we are seeing increased engagement, students teaching each other, excitement about the presentations of learning, stronger peer relationships, and the utilization of community resources.

From the driving question, students researched different animals including their life span, food and space needs, and scheduled meetings with local veterinarians. They concluded this project with a presentation of learning that determined a hamster was the best class pet. Pictured below is Smokey Georgie Riverwalk, third grade's class pet.

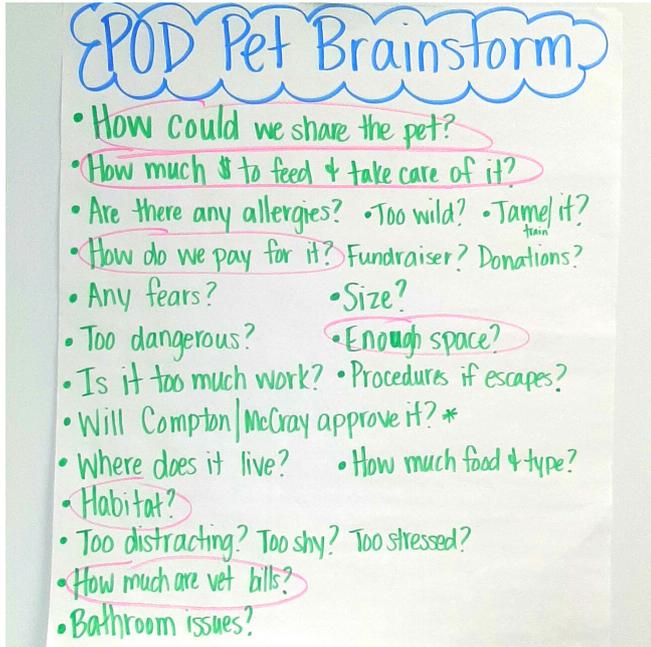


The learning process preceding the presentation of learning is the key to PBL, and driving questions are the fuel to PBL in the classroom. Multiple state standards are included in each driving question. One driving question the third grade classes at Riverwalk Academy used is "Which animal makes the best class pet?" Through these projects, students are challenged to learn soft skills and acquire academic knowledge. With PBL, facilitators must teach soft skills like delegation, working together, and time management before they can ever address the academic.



Project-Based Learning In Action

Students are challenged to learn how to successfully work in groups, be a great collaborator, and manage personality differences.



Fully thinking through the questions and understanding the full concept is very important to PBL (Pictured above). Reflection is also a large factor in PBL for both students and teachers. Through all stages of the PBL process, students and teachers must reflect and determine how things are going and what can be better. Students are graded on rubrics, and these grades include both independent grades and group grades. Knowledge of standards are assessed individually then followed by a group effort assessment. Students understand what needs to be done, the deadlines, the expectations in the classroom, and how the new knowledge is purposeful.

This allows for further knowledge as the "student" role is changed to the "learner" role. DeLangie states, "Many students were so engaged in the designing and planning they didn't realize that they were learning!" Students retain more knowledge through PBL. If students feel there is no value in what they are learning, they will not retain the information as well. With PBL, these students are learning about things that are applicable to their lives and further their understanding of the world they live in.



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June Farquhar
Third Grade Student
"I love getting to
work
TOGETHER on
our projects and
answering the
driving
question!"

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