

# What is The Project Approach?



The Project Approach, is a specific kind of project-based learning coined by Dr. Sylvia C. Chard, which brings a number of advantages to our Pinnacle classrooms and represents best practices in 21st-century education. It fits securely within both a long history of innovative teaching and learning practices—dating back, at least, to the 16th century—and within the framework of today’s growing body of research on what students need to find success and fulfillment in the current (and future) world.

## About The Project Approach

The Project Approach refers to a set of teaching strategies that enable teachers to guide students through in-depth studies of real-world topics. When teachers implement the Approach successfully, students feel highly motivated and actively involved in their own learning, leading them to produce high-quality work and to grow as individuals and collaborators.

A project, by definition, is an in-depth investigation of a real-world topic worthy of a student’s attention and effort. The study may be carried out with an entire class or with small groups of students—most often at the preschool, elementary, and middle school levels. Projects typically do not constitute the whole educational program; instead, teachers use them alongside systematic instruction and as a means of achieving curricular goals.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) supports the following ideas:

- All children come to school with a quest to understand their experiences; all children want to learn.
- Students have diverse strengths, weaknesses, interests, and backgrounds, and capitalizing on these differences enables students to learn from each other and to grow as individuals.

- Students learn best when they have a positive self esteem and sense of purpose.
- Students learn through a mixture of first-hand observation, hands-on experience, systematic instruction, and personal reflection.
- Teaching and learning are interactive processes.
- Social and emotional skills are as important as academic skills and knowledge.
- Classrooms are flexible learning spaces that support and adapt to student needs.

## A Sense of Purpose in the Classroom

Students can assume some responsibility for the kinds of work they undertake in project activities. For example, the teacher can enable them to select the level of challenge with which they feel confident, the length of time they plan to take, the level of detail or elaboration which might be appropriate for them, and whether they wish to work alone or with another student. Making choices of this nature allows students to take ownership of some of the work and accept responsibility for the amount of effort and the quality of the ideas that they bring to the activity or resulting product.

Students who are used to the kind of learning climate described here exhibit considerable intrinsic motivation to negotiate possibilities with the teacher in their own work. Where the teacher encourages such an approach to learning, the social culture that develops in the classroom is a community of learners that positions teachers alongside their students.

The Project outline:

- I. Introduction
- II. Preliminary Planning and Selection of the Topic
- III. Phase 1:  
Discussion, Experience, Knowledge, Wondering, Questions, Letter to parents
- IV. Phase 2:  
Fieldwork, Discussion, Investigations, Visiting experts, Representation, Display
- V. Phase 3:  
Culminating event, Collaborative evaluation, Activities, Discussion, Grading Rubric

*This information is excerpted from Dr. Sylvia C. Chard's website. For more information about the Project Approach, please visit <http://projectapproach.org>.*