

PBL vs PBL21 – a comparison

	Traditional PBL	PBL21
Focus of the Project	Determined by the teacher to fulfill requirements for the content standards.	Students have a voice and choice as they explore topics and issues that are relevant, rigorous and real world.
Planning Process	Begin with the standards, automatically eliminating many excellent possibilities for student learning and inquiry.	Do not begin with the standards, but with an inspiration, idea or theme. Opens the door to many excellent, high level explorations and experiences.
The Disciplines	Frequently not interdisciplinary	Connect as many disciplines as possible – when they are a good “fit” for the topic.
Level of Challenge	Learning goals, activities and assessments are frequently at the lower level of Bloom’s	Learning goals, activities and assessments are intentionally designed at the highest level of Bloom’s
Literacy	Reading, writing and math	Multiple literacies for the 21 st century, i.e., Media Literacy, Ecoliteracy, Financial Literacy, etc.
Organization of the school	Departmentalized by discipline.	Smaller Learning Communities – interdisciplinary team of teachers works with a set group of students every day.
The “Classroom”	Defined by the four walls of the traditional classroom, “cells and bells” structure.	Expands beyond the four walls to the campus and the community – from local to national to global.

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School/bell schedule	Usually 45-minutes per class period.	Flexible schedule created by the members of the Smaller Learning Community. Except for start and end of the school day, lunch and planning periods, schedules are flexed as needed.
Role of the Teacher	Teacher-centered – teacher delivers knowledge to students, frequent use of lecture as mode of instruction.	Student-Centered – teacher is facilitator of students’ constructing knowledge on their own. Mini-lessons are utilized when needed to introduce new concepts or skills. These can vary from whole-group to small group to individual lessons.
Role of the Student	Students receive knowledge as they listen, take notes, follow directions and complete assignments. Students work alone, or if in groups, strongly managed by teacher direction.	Students actively construct knowledge as they work in a variety of modes as needed – independent, interdependent, and self-directed.
Resources/Materials	Textbooks, workbooks and worksheets are the primary resources. All materials are selected and assigned by the teacher.	A wide variety of materials and resources are utilized for student exploration. Textbooks, if used as all, serve only as one of many resources. Students select materials and resources (approved by the teacher).
Personalization	All activities are prescribed in advance – no flexibility for personalized learning.	Truly personalized – supporting students in their individual interests and talents.

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Lesson Plans	Pre-planned, usually by the day, and often by the minute. No flexibility.	Based upon the project's overall learning goals, a flexible schedule ensures that daily learning activities support students' learning needs.
Assessment	Pre-determined products assigned by teachers. All students create the same product. In many cases, the product is a low level activity.	Authentic assessment – very high level product utilizing 21 st century skills, applying and incorporating knowledge learned through research. Product is created in a medium of choice.
Evaluation	Students submit assigned products to the teacher; the teacher evaluates/grades the product.	Students present their products publicly. Evaluations include student self-assessment, student peer assessment, and evaluation by outside evaluators.
Grading	Students' grades are averaged.	Students' grades reflect and are based upon what was learned, not by "when" it was learned.