

What's the Difference Between “Doing Projects” and *Project Based Learning*?

Projects . . .	<i>Project Based Learning . . .</i>
Can be done at home without teacher guidance or team collaboration.	Requires teacher guidance and team collaboration.
Can be outlined in detail on one piece of paper by the teacher.	Includes many “Need to Knows” on the part of the students and teachers.
Are used year after year and usually focus on product (make a mobile, a poster, a diorama, etc.).	Is timely, complex, covers many TEKS, and takes a team of highly trained professionals significant time to plan and implement.
The teacher work occurs mainly after the project is complete.	The teacher work occurs mainly before the project starts.
The students do not have many opportunities to make choices at any point in the project.	The students make most of the choices during the project within the pre-approved guidelines. The teacher is often surprised and even delighted with the students’ choices.
Are based upon directions and are done “like last year.”	Is based upon Driving Questions that encompass every aspect of the learning that will occur and establishes the need to know.
Are often graded based teacher perceptions that may or may not be explicitly shared with students, like neatness.	Is graded based on a clearly defined rubric made or modified specifically for the project.
Are closed: every project has the same goal. (As in the example below, the end result is always The Alamo.)	Is open: students make choices that determine the outcome and path of the research.
Cannot be used in the real world to solve real problems.	Could provide solutions in the real world to real problems even though they may not be implemented.
Are not particularly relevant to students’ lives.	Is relevant to students’ lives or future lives.
Do not resemble work done in the real world.	Is just like or closely resembles work done in the real world.
Do not include scenarios and background information or are based on events that have already been resolved.	The scenario or simulation is real or if it is fictitious, is realistic, entertaining, and timely.
Are sometimes based around a tool for the sake of the tool rather than of an authentic question. (Make a Prezi.)	Use technology, tools, and practices of the real world work environment purposefully. Students choose tools according to purposes.
Happen after the “real” learning has already occurred and are just the “dessert.” May be used as a summative assessments.	Is how students do the real learning.
Are turned in.	Is presented to a public audience encompassing people from outside the classroom.
Are all the same.	Is different.
Make a model (or diorama or mobile . . .) of the Alamo.	Design a fortification that would take your community through a bio (or other non-traditional attack) and make a recommendation to the city council for future planning.