

# Project-Based Learning

**D**URING HER PRESENTATION at CHADD's 2016 annual conference, Susan Kologi, PhD, spoke of the potential advantages of project-based learning (PBL) over more traditional teaching methods when working with students with ADHD. Kologi, the academic director of Novitas Academy in Emmett, Idaho, successfully integrated PBL into the school day and saw firsthand how her students with ADHD have taken to this more hands-on approach to learning. More about her experiences shortly; first, a brief overview of this innovative teaching approach.

PBL strives to make learning personally meaningful and relevant. Projects will often explore answers to complex questions, problems, or challenges that have real-world importance. Teachers serve as facilitators, guiding students through experiences that result in successful completion of class projects.

Students typically work in teams, with each team member playing an important role in successfully completing their team's project. Teams then communicate what they learned to fellow students, teachers, and in some instances,

their parents and other members of the school community. Here are a few examples of class projects:

- A group of high school students organized a conference for students from other high schools, focusing on preventing stigma. Speakers included high school students who are successfully rising above a range of mental health or learning challenges.
- A group of high school students interviewed war veterans in order to learn more about the nature of human resilience. The war veterans' photographs and personal stories hang in the school's hallways, so that visitors can learn more about their heroic actions in the face of extreme adversity.
- As part of a science project, elementary school children studied things that fly (birds, insects, airplanes). They then created a full-sized paper model of what human beings would look like if they too could fly.

You can find an extensive review of projects gathered from online libraries on the website of the Buck Institute for Education, [www.bie.org](http://www.bie.org). Projects cover multiple subjects encompassing all grade levels.



Advocates of PBL say it's the best teaching method for incorporating the "Four Cs" students will need to succeed in today's world, sometimes referred to as twenty-first century competencies:

- critical thinking
- collaboration
- communication
- creativity

Advocates also believe that PBL fosters a sense of mastery, or the belief that if we work hard and are willing to learn from our mistakes, we'll achieve our goals. Projects incorporate these mastery-building experiences. They require sustained effort and a willingness to explore new learning experiences where mistakes can and do happen. It's all part of the learning process.

Perhaps it should come as no surprise that Kologi finds PBL to be an effective teaching strategy for students with ADHD. It draws upon student interest, while de-emphasizing more repetitive or rote memorization teaching strategies. Says Kologi, "Rarely do we hear our students with ADHD complain of being bored. And we often see them doing better in other areas too, like managing time, regulating their behavior, and getting along with others."

Kologi notes that individualized accommodations often do play an important role in helping her students with ADHD succeed. She finds, for example, that some students require that tasks be displayed visually so they don't overlook an important step in the problem-solving process. Others benefit from visual schedules, timers, or technologies to help them effectively plan, organize, and manage time. Still others require individual coaching to help them work more effectively with fellow team members.

Kologi, whose doctoral dissertation was on the topic of project-based learning, has developed a range of tools, strategies, and accommodations uniquely tailored to students with ADHD engaged in PBL. Email her directly at [drkologi@novitasacademy.org](mailto:drkologi@novitasacademy.org) to learn more about her work. Links to other helpful PBL resources are presented below. 📍

*A clinical and consulting psychologist, Mark Katz, PhD, is the director of Learning Development Services, an educational, psychological, and neuropsychological center in San Diego, California. As a contributing editor to Attention magazine, he writes the Promising Practices column and serves on the editorial advisory board. He is also a former member of CHADD's professional advisory board and a recipient of the CHADD Hall of Fame Award.*

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