

# PROJECT-BASED INSTRUCTION

## Learning in Real-World Context Benefits ELLs

By Michelle Kuamoo

Educators are faced with the challenge of meeting the needs of English language learners (ELLs) while maintaining high standards and accountability with limited funding and resources. How can teachers educate a class full of ELL students, each with different abilities, cultures, and learning styles? One method builds on the resources readily available within one's local environment: project-based instruction. Project-based instruction features interdisciplinary learning activities that are long-term, relevant, and student centered. Students learn through the exploration of real-world contexts such as creating a community garden, studying local botanical and wildlife environments, recreating a historical event, and developing a newspaper or website.

What are the benefits of project-based instruction for ELLs? This approach creates a learning environment where all learning is valued. Students demonstrate greater self-esteem and increased motivation to learn, and have greater opportunities to problem solve and communicate within a social and academic context. ELLs specifically benefit from project-based instruction because new information and content is organized and presented within a real-world context. The introduction of real-world study creates relevancy and motivation to learn, and allows students to build upon prior knowledge. New vocabulary is introduced within an interdisciplinary approach that is meaningful

and relevant to the student's life. Projects might include:

- tracking daily temperatures on a spreadsheet and converting the temperatures from Fahrenheit to Centigrade, or
- pretending to be zoologists cataloging animal species from around the world into a computer database.

How do you create a project-based classroom or school? Jennifer Railsback's 2002 booklet *Project-Based Instruction: Creating Excitement for Learning* (available at [www.nwrel.org/request/2002aug/textonly.html](http://www.nwrel.org/request/2002aug/textonly.html)) is an excellent source of information. The author recommends implementing early planning and design at the classroom or school levels. Project-based instruction requires staff to work collaboratively to plan and align the curriculum and the theme of the project to state and/or district standards. Projects can be designed to last a month, quarter, semester, or an entire academic year.

How do you implement project-based instruction on a limited budget? Schools with limited resources can adopt projects that build upon the resources found within their local environments. Resources can include community organizations, technology, and local libraries. The sample project-based unit below presents an example of a third grade project based on plants that grow in the Pacific.

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### Sample Project-Based Unit The Taro Plant: Making Taro Bread

Content Area	Activity	Resources
Math	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study units of measurement: liters, quarts, pints, etc.</li> <li>• Convert units of measurement by computing fractional units.</li> </ul>	Library Internet
Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study the chemical reactions that occur as the bread is rising, such as the role of yeast.</li> <li>• Study the different varieties of taro.</li> </ul>	Local grocery stores Taro farmers
Social Studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study the history of the taro plant in the Pacific.</li> <li>• Study the taro products found in the Pacific.</li> </ul>	Library Internet
Literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read about growing taro plants.</li> <li>• Read about taro as a food.</li> <li>• Study Pacific history and legends.</li> </ul>	Library Internet
Writing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Write directions for making taro bread in sequential order.</li> <li>• Write short research reports about taro in the Pacific.</li> </ul>	Library Internet
Drama	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reenact the life cycle of the taro plant.</li> <li>• Reenact the steps in the taro bread recipe.</li> </ul>	Library Internet
Art	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study the role of the taro plant in the artwork of Pacific cultures.</li> <li>• Create taro art.</li> </ul>	Library Internet