

An Educator's Guide to Project-Based Learning: Turning Theory into Practice

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Book Review:

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An Educator's Guide to Project-Based Learning: Turning Theory into Practice

by Fey Cole

New York, USA: Routledge, 2024, 128 pages
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Project-Based Learning (Henceforth PBL) is establishing recognition as a student-centred method that encourages actual problem-solving, teamwork, and critical thinking. Fey Cole's book, *An Educator's Guide to Project-Based Learning: Turning Theory into Practice*, is a good and up-to-date resource that links theory with practice. The book provides teachers with both ideas and real-world resources for creating innovative and imaginative learning spaces that are effective for 21st-century education. It includes everything from preschool to college and beyond. The flow of the chapters is followed in this review, and it highlights how Cole blends theory, practice, and reflection. Additionally, it highlights areas where the argument appears to be less developed, such as the constraints of the structure and the range of cultures.

Proving that PBL is a student-centred, transformative method, the first chapter, "What is Project-Based Learning?", gives a complete picture of the theoretical and practical foundations. Cole stresses that learning is a collaborative, inquiry-driven process by using ideas from constructivist theorists, including Rousseau, Confucius, Piaget, and Vygotsky. She importantly places teachers as facilitators instead of knowledge transmitters, which is in line with Dewey's ideas on experiential and democratic education. While theoretically sound, the chapter could



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benefit from incorporating more case studies from diverse cultural and educational contexts to illustrate its practical applications.

The second chapter, "Developing a Project-Based Learning Culture," expands beyond this idea by arguing that students need to be able to think creatively, critically, and collaboratively, and by criticizing traditional methods of instruction. Cole uses Freire's idea of the "Practice of Freedom" to argue that education has two crucial jobs, namely, to prepare students for the problems they will encounter in the future and to give them the power to make the world a better place. Curiosity boards, reflective notebooks, and flexible classroom settings are all examples of how PBL culture may be built in real life. Still, some of these ideas may seem too idealistic and hard to put into action in schools with limited resources, which makes them a little less transferable.

The next chapter, "Growing as an Educator Through Project-Based Learning," is about how educators can grow professionally. Cole emphasizes that PBL not only changes students but also makes teachers reflect on their teaching practices. She shows how play, socializing, and global perspectives can make education more exciting while also promoting sustainability. Social justice and inclusivity are promoted through imaginative examples, such as team building with LEGO and student-led newsletters. Even though these examples are motivating, they mostly come from Western schools, and teachers in disciplinary institutions may struggle to use them without assistance from the system.

Continuing this theme, "Developing Spaces That Embrace Flow and Curiosity for Learning" emphasizes the importance of the physical and emotional environment. Cole highlights environmentally friendly design, outdoor learning, and "messy learning" to promote exploration, cooperation, and creativity. Incorporating Csikszentmihalyi's idea of "flow" to her argument strengthens it by showing that immersive and curiosity-driven spaces can help students become lifelong learners. However, focusing on studying outside and in the surroundings may not be feasible for schools in cities where space is restricted.

In "Scaffolding Learning Through Project-Based Learning," Cole elaborates on how teachers might assist students through thoughtfully designed frameworks. Using models as Ba and the SECI framework, she discusses the importance of play-based methods, such as AnjiPlay in China and differentiated instruction. This chapter shows how scaffolding helps students become more independent and learn more deeply by emphasizing flexibility and critical involvement. However, beginner teachers may find the sophisticated theoretical framework to be inaccessible; more basic practical assistance could enhance the chapter's practicality.

Chapters 6 and 7 discuss the problems and challenges associated with implementing PBL. Chapter 6 introduces some of the most prevalent issues, such as not having enough resources and refusing to change, followed by giving tips on how to overcome them. Many of the answers are still too vague, despite being helpful. More comprehensive case studies of schools that have successfully overcome these problems would make the chapter more valuable. Chapter 7, on the other hand, talks about how important it is for students to become involved in projects that bring together people of all ages and from throughout the world. The chapter is intriguing, but it does not adequately address the practical and cultural problems that could hinder cooperation.

The following three chapters, 8 to 10, examine PBL in specific types of schools, including early childhood, primary, and secondary schools. These chapters are beneficial for language and subject teachers seeking effective strategies for their students' ages. Gardening, storytelling, creating future schools, and renewable energy projects are all examples of how PBL can be used with people of all ages and in a variety of situations. They also help students build skills that are important in the 21st century. However, these chapters might talk more about institutional limitations, such as time limits and exam-driven curricula, that make PBL less practical in real life.

Chapter 11 discusses further and additional education, focusing on occupational and transferable skills. Chesterfield College and other schools demonstrate how sustainability projects and relationships with businesses can enhance student learning. The chapter would benefit from further empirical data regarding the long-term efficacy of PBL in higher education to validate its statements. Chapter 12 keeps the momentum going by introducing the Alexandrite Education Programme (#AlexandriteEDPRO) as a way to make PBL practices more sustainable and creative. This part discusses how resilience, teamwork, and professional growth are crucial for achieving long-term impact. The Alexandrite metaphor is innovative, but it can be too abstract for some readers. They might want more explicit, step-by-step instructions instead.

The last chapter, “Celebrating the Successes and Achievements of PBL,” emphasizes the importance of recognizing and reflecting on your successes. Cole demonstrates how celebrating achievements can boost motivation, social and emotional health, and lifelong learning by promoting activities such as creativity weeks, showcases, and community fairs. The chapter could, however, be more straightforward about how to balance activities with official academic assessment in systems that are focused on exams.

In a nutshell, this book adds a significant contribution to the growing body of literature on student-centred pedagogy. By carefully combining theoretical ideas, practical tips, and real-life examples, it gives teachers both ideas and clear steps to take to use PBL in a variety of educational settings. As a result, it is easy to use and focus on creativity, cooperation, and authentic learning. It will be a helpful tool for teachers, practitioners, and educational leaders who want to create meaningful and lasting learning experiences. The book also neglects to delve into much detail about aspects such as strict curriculum policies, differences in school resources, and a non-Western point of view, resulting in some parts being underdiscussed. Returning to the book’s stated goal of linking theory and practice, Cole still makes a strong case for PBL as a transformative strategy that can give students the skills, confidence, and freedom they need to thrive in a world that is both linked and unpredictable.

References

Cole, F. (2024). *An educator’s guide to project-based learning: Turning theory into practice*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003424345>



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