

## Project Based Learning for Special Education and Inclusion

### Engaging Students Across Abilities Benefits All Children

by [Jerry Webster](#)

Updated May 13, 2017

[Project-based learning](#) is an excellent way to differentiate instruction in a full inclusion classroom especially when that class includes students of widely different abilities, from the cognitively or developmentally disabled to the gifted children. Project-based learning is also excellent in resource rooms or self-contained classrooms with either typically developing partners or with sufficient support or accommodations.

In project based learning, either you, or your students, devise projects that will support content in a way that will challenge students to go deeper or further. Examples:

Science: Create a model of a concept, perhaps insects, and label each part.

Reading: Create a television commercial or a web page to promote a book, one you have read together or one that the group has read in a literary circle.

Social Studies: Create a play, a power point presentation, or display for a State (as in Michigan,) a country, a political system (socialism, capitalism, republic, etc.) or a political point of view.

Math: Plan a trip to a preferred spot (Paris, Tokyo) and create a budget for hotels, flights, meals, etc.

In each case the project may support any number of educational objectives:

#### **Reinforce content retention:**

Project learning has proven, in research, to improve concept retention in a range of students.

#### **Deepen understanding:**

When students are asked to use content knowledge, they are driven to use higher level thinking skills ([Blooms Taxonomy](#)) such as Evaluate or Create.

#### **Multi-sensory instruction:**

Students, not just students with disabilities, all come with different learning styles. Some are strongly visual learners, some are auditory. Some are kinetic, and learn best when they can move. Many children benefit from sensory input, and students who are ADHD or Dyslexic benefit from being able to move as they process information.

#### **Teaches skills in cooperation and [collaboration](#):**

Future jobs will require not only higher levels of training and technical skills, but also the ability to work collaboratively in groups. Groups work well when they are chosen by both the teacher and the students: some groups could be affinity based, others could be cross ability, and some could be "friendship" based.

## **Alternate means of assessing students' progress:**

Using a rubric to lay out standards can put students of varying abilities on a level playing field.

## **Student engagement at its best:**

When students are excited about what they are doing in school, they will behave better, participate more fully and benefit the most.

Project based learning is a powerful tool for the inclusive classroom. Even if a student or students spend part of their day in a resource or self-contained classroom, the time they spend in project based collaboration will be time when typically developing peers will model both good classroom and academic behavior. Projects can enable gifted students to push their academic and intellectual limits. Projects are acceptable across abilities, when they meet the criterion established in a [rubric](#).

Project based learning also works well with small groups of students.

Pictured above is the scale model of the solar system one of my students with Autism created with me: We figured out the scale together, measured the size of the planets, and measured the distances between the planets. He now knows the order of the planets, the difference between terrestrial and gaseous planets and can tell you why most planets are uninhabitable.

**CITE**