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

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| **Projects . . .** | **Project-Based Learning . . .** |
| 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 on 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 assessment. | 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. |

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