

HISTORICAL INQUIRY REIMAGINED: CENTERING MIDDLE SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES IN PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

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01 TARGET LEARNER

The intended learners for this reinvented history class are middle school students who are highly motivated by relevance and collaboration. For this design to work, it requires teachers who are willing to create an environment of positive “cultural identity, responsible ownership, and collaborative productive relationships” (Krajcik et al., 2023).

This model shifts the students’ role from passive receiver of IRE dialogue to an active historian (Polman, 2004).

02 VALUE PROPOSITION

Deeper Content Mastery:
Duke et al. found that Project-Based Learning led to higher growth in social studies and informational reading. Project-based learning can be used for rigorous content to promote mastery.

Academic Skills:
Krajcik et al. found that through Project-Based Learning, students reported higher levels of self-reflection and collaboration. These are essential skills for group work and being able to corroborate sources and defend research.

Agency:
By using the dialogic structures established by Polman, students are required to negotiate actions and maintain control of their own inquiry process. This was shown to increase their motivation and ownership of their work.

03 PROJECT-BASED LEARNING CHARACTERISTICS

Intellectual Challenge and Accomplishment:
This fosters sensemaking and collaboration within learning through complex tasks.

Authenticity:
This allows students to establish relevance of learning by reflecting on the social world and connecting the impact to their projects.

Public Product:
This capitalizes on human connection in learning and allows students to take ownership and share with audiences beyond the classroom.

Collaboration:
Through strategic communication, students are able to ask complex questions, see other points of view, and participate in collective inquiry.

Project Management:
Students organize their work over time and establish time management to complete work in given timelines.

Reflection:
Students examine different perspectives and biases to take part in metacognitive processes of their learning.

04 LEARNING PATHWAYS AND PROCEDURES

Curriculum:
Defined by an open-ended research question and requiring a public product.

Pedagogical Structure:
Broken into sequential milestones with frequent check-ins between student and teacher, requiring students to make claims, assemble data, and discuss with peers.

Discourse: Teachers will replace traditional I-R-E with:

- Action negotiation dialogues: this discourse is focused on the students’ next steps and directions
- Action feedback dialogues: this is focused on critiquing the student claims and evidence while allowing them to maintain agency (Polman, 2004)

Final Product:
In order to catalyze learning, students will develop a product for a public audience that is authentic to their learning experience and research question (Duke et al., 2021).

05 NOVELTY

Perspective:
The novelty of this design is that it centers students in learning, manage historical discourse, and preserve student agency.

Targeted Discourse:
This design implements Polman’s dialogic structures to scaffold historical learning process and teaching more than the facts students need.

Shifting Classroom Talk:
By replacing Initiation-Reply-Evaluation with Polman’s dialogic structures, the teacher focuses on guiding student agency of their process, similar to the model of a historian.

Compatibility with Social Studies:
PBL allows students to connect with history and current societal problems. It moves them through authentic issues and problems and probes them to take informed action.

06 PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

Classrooms will be situated in the unit of study through immersive decorations, flexible grouping, and a designated space for students to share their work.

07 GROUNDING IN RESEARCH

This PBL model is grounded in three empirical and theoretical sources. Duke et al. provides empirical proof that PBL is effective for social studies retention. The structural framework and collaborative outcomes for this model is validated by Krajcik et al. Finally, the core instructional mechanisms rely on the dialogic structures of Polman that explain how to manage inquiry and student agency of learning.