

Assessing Projects: Encouraging Self-Direction and Collaboration

Project Plans

Co-Planning a Project

Project plans are usually contracts between students and teachers that describe the components of a project, such as the goals, the process for reaching the goals, a timeline, and criteria for assessment of learning. Plans are either developed solely by the students themselves or more often with teacher assistance. When students have a plan to refer to throughout the project, it helps them monitor their progress, adjust as necessary, reflect on the process, and ask for guidance when needed. This method balances students' choice in their learning with responsibility for expectations.

There are two distinct areas of assessment when using project plans:

- The resulting product or performance that is assessed by the criteria established in the plan
- The student's process of setting up and carrying out the project is also a performance that can be assessed

Initially, students need help setting goals and deadlines for these plans. Goal setting is critical because students need clear targets to measure their performance. Students often set goals and timelines that are too difficult to reach. Facilitate this process by questioning, negotiating, and helping students create feasible plans of action. Also consider modeling learning strategies such as predicting, questioning, clarifying, and summarizing, so that students will develop the ability to use these strategies on their own while they work on projects. Critical questions to ask include:

- What do you intend to learn?
- What strategies and resources will you need?
- What evidence will you produce to demonstrate your learning?
- What will be the criteria for assessment? How will you know you have been successful?
- What is your timeline for completing your learning?

During project implementation, control gradually shifts from the teacher to students. Students develop ownership in setting goals and deciding what is worthwhile learning and then continue to exercise a great deal of independence as they approach the learning tasks.

Some of the benefits of using project plans include:

- Encourages responsible self-directed learning
 - Helps students learn to plan and make decisions about their learning
 - Helps students learn to manage their time
- Allows for individual pacing
- Involves students in curriculum planning
- Targets meaningful tasks
- Provides students with clear goals and expectations
- Fosters self-reflection and self-assessment