

## Introduction

### 1. Question for you

What are you most fascinated by? What interests you?

Put your mind in a zone of desire, interest and exploration, because that's the foundation for project-based learning.

### 2. Introduction to our family

Mom, Dad, three teenagers.

In a nutshell we are a tech, media, creative, outdoorsy family. We like to travel and have adventures.

Social Media & Websites links:

[renee.tougas.net](http://renee.tougas.net) - Renee's blog

[outsideways.com](http://outsideways.com) - Damien's current project, an online adventure journaling platform

<https://www.instagram.com/mypictograph/> - Laurent's Instagram

<https://www.instagram.com/sparklypinkbling/> - Brienne's Instagram

### 3. Disclaimer

The projects your children do and what they learn from those projects will be different than my own family's journey.

But with authentic project based learning you will learn how to make ideas into reality, regardless of the type of projects you do. And *these principles* are the same regardless of the project.

### 4. Philosophy Sound Byte

Some of the core principles of my homeschool philosophy:

- Education is to develop the autonomy of the individual in the context of family, community, and society, for the purpose glorifying God and serving humanity.
- The best\* learning is based on a foundation of trust, not fear.
- Learning's highest aim, and primary purpose, to build relationship; to build relationship with self, God, each other, and with knowledge itself.
- Humans learn best when we are self-motivated.

\*By best, I mean the learning allows for the integration of spirit, body, and mind, it's holistic.

**My aim is to create a family culture and homeschool curriculum that cultivates relationship, trust, freedom, self-motivation, and service/mission.**

## 5. What is Project Based Learning

- Project based learning is not teacher/parent assigned projects.
- Project based learning is doing real work that is *chosen by the learner*, and *done by the learner*, with the help of attentive adults/teachers who are there to mentor, facilitate, and support.
- The child/learner drives the projects, not the parent/teacher.
- The goal of project based learning is to mentor self-directed learners, "to raise skilled thinkers and adept learners who can adjust to what the future does out"\*.
- *Project-based learning develops a child's competence to direct and manage her own learning.*

Three key principles: "self-chosen, self-directed, self-managed", Lori Pickert\*

## 6. Key Benefits of Project Based Learning

The benefits are already stated above, to reiterate:

- The learner engages in meaningful work, it's not busy work.
- It helps the child to meet his own goals, it facilitates self-directed learning.
- It helps the child acquire the skills to think, learn, make and do.
- There's no false-ness, it's authentic to the learner and the world. It's real.

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## How does it work/What does it look like?

Project-based learning, in a nutshell, is the child doing things, making things, working through a project, big or small, with the help of adults/parents/teachers/mentors.

This doesn't just happen on its own, there are tools, structures, and strategies that facilitate this type of learning. This is not a hands-off approach to homeschooling, it's very hands-on.

## Key Strategies & Tools

- Time & Space
- Relationship & Trust
- Doing the Work

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## Time & Space

### Time

You need to make time for project-based learning. Project based learning can be the way you homeschool or it can be a part of your homeschool, but it takes time. And it can't happen, fully, in the margins.

We've devoted time for projects in different ways:

- The main "show"
- A significant part of the schedule
- Seasonal

Project based learning is deep learning, you're integrating a lot of things and that takes energy and time. And you'll make mistakes, and mistakes take time. And that's part of the process.

"It's not a waste of time for children to solve their own problems." Lori Pickert

### Space

- This is literally the space in your home for kids to make messes and get creative.
- You don't need a homeschool room.
- This is more about attitude and routines than it is about physical space.
- Let the kids make messes and teach them how to clean them up.

## Relationship & Trust

**This type of learning is rooted in relationship**, because in order to mentor your individual learner through an individual project (or even group project, amongst your kids or family) you have to know that person. What excites your student? What are her interests? What are his strengths and weaknesses?

**This type of learning is rooted in trust**, because you do not control the process, or the outcome, it's open-ended and it evolves. All deep and lasting relationships are like this, they require trust. And this type of learning is no different.

**This is a learner-motivated process**, you will help your children grow to be self-directed and self-managed. You don't determine the projects, you don't bribe your children with prizes or money to finish the project, you don't punish. It's about developing what's inside them.

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## Doing the Work

### An Iterative Process

This is the practical nitty-gritty, but still it is not a step by step process, because project based learning is not usually linear. It's a cycle.

Project based learning is an *iterative process* which means it loops around in a *design, develop, and test pattern*.

The term iterative come from computational mathematics, computer programming and web development.

### Observe & Record

Project based learning and other student-directed learning doesn't have standardized assessments. You're not assessing the student against another student or external measurement.

You're not giving tests, worksheets to complete, or having kids submit written work, which you will grade. **You record what you observe happening. You observe and record the learning and this is a valid assessment tool.** And like all good assessment tools the purpose of observation and recording is to guide and lead future learning.

## Inspirational Activities

Expose kids to books, conversations, travel, adventure, music, media & technology. Do stuff together, go places, watch inspiring movies and documentaries, share interesting YouTube videos with each other, give your kids access to age-appropriate tech. There is no limit to the possibilities here.

## Resources

Provide the best quality resources you can. We all have something different to give our kids, different financial means, as much as you are able provide quality materials to work with. **Think about resources in the broader context: what's available in your home, the digital world, your community, the world-at-large.**

## Research & Play

Often before our kids take on a project or a goal they spend time researching, studying, immersing themselves in something. They been exposed to an idea; they are curious, they read, watch, discover more before the decide to "make something" (engage in a project).

Research could be in a book, or "fieldwork". It's exploration and play. **Research comes before a project and during a project, it's integral to the whole process.**

## Meetings & Interviews (Real world assessment)

When your kids are little these are very informal and they might not recognize them as meetings at all. It could be you sitting down on the couch, having read a book together or having gone somewhere together, working in the yard together, out for a nature walk, etc... and a project idea is proposed.

As our kids have gotten older we have formalized this process, for accountability and support. We meet with our kids on a regular basis to check in with their studies (not just projects but also their lessons, etc.) since as they've gotten older most of their work is independent from us.

Real-world project management questions:

- What did you do yesterday?
- What will you do today?
- Are there any impediments in your way?

Our project based learning homeschool questions:

- What have you been working on? What have you done since our last meeting?
- What are you doing next?
- What are the roadblocks?
- How can we remove those/move past or through them? How can we help?

These interviews, meetings, or informal chats (however they happen) around these questions help you assess where your child is at, identify weaknesses and roadblocks and help you make a plan for moving forward, with the necessary accountability and assistance.

The frequency and depth of these meetings will depend on child's age, project and your personal management style.

More at: <http://renee.tougas.net/blog/project-based-learning-interview-assessments/>

## Supports & Follow-up

- *The importance of meetings, interviews and observations is that you know where and what kind of support is needed. And you personally provide your support or help your child find what they need to get over roadblocks. A lot of projects in a homeschool environment or life in general needs supports and inputs from multiple places. It's collaborative.*
- Through this process, your student learns to identify weakness and struggle and seek help and they know help will be given and this fosters relationship and trust and a growth mindset about learning.
- Projects are often about overcoming unseen, unanticipated obstacles and barriers; and learning how to move through that.
- Your job is to help them get over the roadblock or hump. We don't remove it, by doing it for them, but we assist them. *This is a crucial piece, and our students may be frustrated at this point, we might be frustrated, but this is a key element to project based learning, overcoming obstacles.*
- There can be criticism for interest-driven learning and self-motivated work because people make assumptions that you'll just move through life, or your education, doing easy things and you won't learn discipline or how to overcome challenges. I suggest, and have evidence and personal experience, to prove the opposite. Self-motivated and self-chosen work provides the motivation needed to overcome the inevitable obstacles, with support and help.

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## How does it fit into a homeschool curriculum

- **It can fit however you want it to.**
- The key thing is to provide the time.

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## What it looks like through the ages and stages

I use the Phases of learning from the Leadership Education model

In my personal experience and observation:

- Core phase (0-8) - play, kids build and craft, and make stuff in the backyard. Lots of legos, cardboard, fabric and glue. Messy. Very hands-on.
- Love of Learning (8-12) - continuation of play, short projects (but longer attention span than before), still often hands-on, making things in the “real world”
- Scholar (12-16) - may take on group projects and assigned projects as a way to meet personal goals (if student chosen those are still developing self-directed learning), will seek mentors and teachers to help them choose and complete projects. Often using technology.
- Depth (16-22) - Will take on income-earning projects and readily accept the direction of mentor, teacher, classes in the design of projects. Launching and establishing your adult life becomes your project.

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## Troubleshooting

Two main issues: My kid isn't motivated or doesn't know what to do.

**Go back to Key Strategies & Tools.**

- Are you providing enough time?
- Do you trust the process?
- Know your child - do they need more external support or direction? The goal of project-based learning is to mentor self-directed learners, "to raise skilled thinkers and adept learners who can adjust to what the future doles out". A child/student that is able to identify the need for external structure is a self-aware learner and thinker. Taking on

external projects, from a place of self-awareness (I choose to do this) absolutely helps a child gain competence to direct and manage her own learning.

- The importance of rest and breaks. None of us produce all the time. It's not a natural. Length and type of break will be based on individual circumstance.
- Just try things, see if they work. If they don't, try something else. This is as much about learning how to learn, as it is what you are doing. It's a both a means and an ends. Don't fear the process.

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## Projects we've done and project ideas

Blog links to just a few projects our kids have done:

<http://renee.tougas.net/blog/miniatures-dollhouse-resources/> - doll houses

<http://renee.tougas.net/blog/miniatures-handmade-toys/> - miniatures and handmade toys

<http://renee.tougas.net/blog/2016-seasonal-art-wall-calendars-for-sale/> - Laurent's calendar sale

<http://renee.tougas.net/blog/letting-them-grow-up-into-who-they-are-meant-to-be/> - apprenticeship and building

<http://renee.tougas.net/blog/introducing-black-widow/> - Celine's comic con and cosplay project

A lot of projects within projects.

- Musical & theatrical productions
- Video games & animation
- Computer programming and web design
- Blogs, podcasts, and other web content publishing
- Parties, events - planning and executing
- Craft projects - small and large
- Building projects, landscaping, gardening
- Creative writing projects - novels, yearbooks
- Designing, building, making something - furniture, treehouse, software, Rube Goldberg, machine, a method to test a theory, knitting socks, etc...
- Science projects scientific experiments are a type of project based learning.
- Making, Doing, Exploring something in the world



## Key takeaways

- Project-based learning is self-chosen, self-directed and self-managed with the adult assisting, guiding, mentoring, facilitating, teaching to meet the learner's self-motivated needs.
- It's an iterative process (cycling back, improving upon itself) that takes time.
- You learn it by doing it.
- Your child's projects will be a reflection of their interests and your family culture.
- Project based learning is a mindset and a methodology for lifelong learning.

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## Resources:

\*Project-Based Homeschooling: Mentoring Self-Directed Learners by Lori Pickert

Leadership Education: The Phases of Learning by Oliver and Rachel DeMille