



The OT-Informed PBL Guide

Designing Inclusive, Whole-Child Learning in K–5 Classrooms

Introduction

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has the potential to be one of the most engaging and meaningful instructional approaches in K–5 classrooms. However, too often it assumes that all learners arrive ready to plan, collaborate, persist through challenges, and regulate their emotions and bodies. **OT-informed Project-Based Learning reframes PBL through a whole-child lens -- intentionally supporting how children think, move, feel, and interact while learning.** By embedding occupational therapy principles alongside executive function, sensory regulation, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) strategies, OT-informed PBL creates learning environments where more students can access rigorous, hands-on learning and experience success.

In MPOWERME's K–5 Zoo Habitat Design Pilot, students demonstrated measurable growth in executive function, collaboration, emotional regulation, and engagement when OT-informed supports were intentionally embedded into PBL instruction.

"OT-informed Project-Based Learning supports how children think, move, feel, and collaborate -- so more learners can access rigorous, hands-on instruction."

Why OT-Informed PBL Works

Traditional PBL often assumes students already have the executive function, self-regulation, and collaboration skills required to manage open-ended tasks. In reality, many learners -- especially neurodivergent students -- require **explicit, embedded supports** to access these demands.

OT-informed PBL bridges this gap by **building supports directly into instruction**, rather than relying on pull-out services or behavior-based interventions. This approach strengthens access, engagement, and persistence without lowering expectations or academic rigor.

What Makes PBL “OT-Informed”?

Rather than publishing our full proprietary framework, this guide provides a high-level overview of the **five core pillars** that guide MPOWERME's OT-informed PBL approach.

1. Sensory & Motor Readiness

Short, predictable warm-ups support regulation and prepare students' bodies and minds for complex problem-solving.

2. Material Fluency

Students build familiarity with tools and materials first—reducing cognitive overload and freeing attention for higher-order thinking.

3. Executive Function Scaffolding

Visual planning tools, structured steps, and guided reflection make invisible thinking skills visible and teachable.

4. Collaboration With Belonging

Intentional group roles and communication supports strengthen social-emotional learning and reduce friction during teamwork.

5. UDL-Aligned Participation

Multiple pathways for engagement and expression allow students to demonstrate understanding through building, talking, drawing, or movement.

Who Benefits From OT-Informed PBL?

This framework is especially effective for:

- Neurodivergent learners (autistic students, ADHD, dyslexia, anxiety)
- Inclusive general-education classrooms
- STEM, STEAM, and maker-space learning environments
- Project-based curricula seeking stronger whole-child outcomes

Educators and schools also benefit through:

- Reduced behavior-related disruptions

- Increased student stamina and independence
- Improved collaboration and team-based learning
- Alignment with MTSS, UDL, and inclusive design goals

Why We Don't Publish the Full Guide

Effective OT-informed PBL requires **intentional design, coaching, and adaptation** based on learners, materials, and instructional contexts. For that reason, MPOWERME delivers full implementation guidance through **consultation and professional learning partnerships**, not as a static download.

We partner with schools and organizations to:

- Adapt existing PBL and STEM curricula through an OT and UDL lens
- Design inclusive PBL pilots and research-informed implementations
- Provide professional development and coaching for educators
- Support edtech and product developers designing for diverse learners
- Analyze impact data and translate outcomes into actionable insights

Let's Build Learning That Works for More Learners

If you are interested in:

- Strengthening executive function and SEL through PBL
- Designing inclusive, multisensory learning experiences
- Improving access without reducing rigor
- Partnering on pilots, professional development, or curriculum design

We'd love to talk.

👉 Contact MPOWERME at mpowermekids@gmail.com to explore OT-informed PBL consultation and professional learning partnerships.
