

Academic Success, Problem-Based Learning and the Middleman: The Community Voice

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Abstract : Although Problem-based learning provides students with multiple opportunities for rigorous instructional experiences in which students are challenged to address problems in the community; there are still gaps in connecting community leaders to the PBL process. At a south Texas high school, community participation serves as an integral component of the PBL process. Problem-based learning (PBL) has recently gained momentum due to the increase in global communities that value collaboration and critical thinking. As an instructional approach, PBL engages high school students in meaningful learning experiences. Furthermore, PBL focuses on providing students with a connection to real-world situations that require effective peer collaboration. For PBL leaders, providing students with a meaningful process is as important as the final PBL outcome. To achieve this goal, STEM high school strategically created a space for community involvement to be woven within the PBL fabric. This study examines the impact community members had on PBL students attending a STEM high school in South Texas. At STEM High School, community members represent a support system that works through the PBL process to ensure students receive real-life mentoring from business and industry leaders situated in the community. A phenomenological study using a semi-structured approach was used to collect data about students' perception of community involvement within the PBL process for one South Texas high school. In our proposed presentation, we will discuss how community involvement in the PBL process academically impacted the educational experience of high school students at STEM high school. We address the instructional concerns PBL critics have with the lack of direct instruction, by providing a representation of how STEM high school utilizes community members to assist in impacting the academic experience of students.

Keywords : phenomenological, STEM education, student engagement, community involvement

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