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ABSTRACT
        Active student involvement in the educational
psychology classroom through project-based learning promotes student
growth toward autonomy and academic success. Guidelines for teaching
through project-based learning are as follows: (1) examining your own
educational philosophy; (2) allowing students the freedom to proceed
as they best function; (3) looking at each course from the
perspective of how it can be presented through student involvement,
participation, and discovery; (4) managing group work effectively;
(5) using a two-tier system to evaluate individual and group work
separately; (6) treating students like the professionals they aspire
to become; and (7) being committed to adapting and changing ideas.
(Contains 7 references.) (Author/SLD)

The Teaching of Educational Psychology

Through Project-Based Learning

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Abstract

Active student involvement in the educational psychology classroom through project-based learning promotes student growth toward autonomy and academic success. Guidelines for teaching through project-based learning are included.

The Teaching of Educational Psychology

Through Project-Based Learning

Though often subtle and very much overlooked, a project-based learning philosophy and an active involvement method of instruction is deeply rooted in the psychological and teaching literature (Thelen, 1960; Bruner, 1966; Aronson, 1978; Purkey & Novak, 1984; Blumenfeld et al., 1991). With this philosophical foundation, the method of instruction under discussion supports the undergraduate student in the pursuit of learning while allowing the student a measure of responsibility and autonomy beyond the direct control of the teacher.

Project-based learning in the educational psychology classroom keeps students actively involved. Active involvement provides an environment where students can learn AND enjoy what they are learning. A major concern is the attitude students have toward educational psychology classes. Students dread these courses since they are viewed as boring, uninteresting, and totally irrelevant to anything they are doing. Why? Because educational psychology courses are often taught in dry, boring, abstract contexts that fail to help the student connect the important foundation educational psychology is intended to foster in student learning. Perhaps students will not only find meaning through educational psychology courses that are taught in a way that is student-centered, but will also be motivated to take more educational psychology courses than are required to graduate.

There are many, many options for a student-centered,
active involvement learning environment. Teachers are only
as limited in what can be accomplished in the classroom by
what they create, seek out through resources, or are willing
to take a chance on (yes, take chances!). Among these are:
cooperative group involvement, individual exploration,
written and oral forums that allow students, whether
individually or collectively, to explore, share, and practice
the issues of their craft--teaching.

There is a huge benefit to teaching through project-
based learning. By engaging future teachers in project-based
learning, they are immersed in the very methods of
instruction (Routman, 1991) their teacher training encourages
them to employ when they are practicing teachers. In
addition, teaching through project-based learning supports,
facilitates and influences students; not only in their
individual learning, but how they come to view their
responsibility toward the students they will someday support,
facilitate, and influence. Given that teachers are such
powerful role models and can influence students at all levels
of the educational spectrum, it is mandatory that teachers
"practice what they preach" not "do as I say, not as I do".

The remaining information presented will outline the
major components I have found to be necessary for the
successful implementation of project-based learning:

1. Examine your philosophy of education. What do you
believe? What are you committed to? What theories,

5

research, methods influences and supports your own ideas?
This is not an idle activity. In fact, it is essential to
teaching through project-based learning. Project-based
learning does not work when thought of as a few howtos.
For me, project-based learning allows me to teach through
what I hold as my philosophy of education: I am, with my
students, a partner in learning. It is my role to facilitate
their efforts by providing them with the knowledge and
experience time as brought. In doing this, they are in
charge. I am merely one more resource for them to rely on.

2. Since students are in charge and are responsible for
their learning, it is very important to allow them the
freedom to proceed as they best function. There is more than
one way to do most anything so the teacher's way is not the
only way (It might also be the worst way!). When ever
possible guidelines for the overall structure of a course
requirement should be given, then students should follow the
guidelines incorporating their own way of producing their
work. Additionally, it is a good plan to have one course
requirement that provides the students with an opportunity to
completely choose what they will do with the course's subject
matter.

3. Each course taught through project-based learning
must be looked at from the perspective of "how can this
information be presented through student involvement,
participation, and discovery?". Thelen's (1960) influence is
evident here in that he posited that students should be

presented with the big picture, then allowed to fill in the details. This makes learning active, not passive; insists that students remain, not only in charge of their learning, but responsible for their learning. There is no need to be concerned about the lack of "lectures" in this classroom environment. It is quite possible for the introduction of information to be delivered before, during and after students proceed. Remember, every time the teacher opens his/her mouth, something in the form of information giving or feedback is provided. This way is just another way of doing so while keeping the focus on the student.

4. Students hate group work, that is until they are in a course where group work is handled properly. The source from which I adapted my procedure for group work is The Jigsaw Classroom by Aronson (1978). My adaptation provides for students to prepare individual contributions outside the classroom, then work together in groups during class time. One day a week is set aside for group work. There are benefits to doing this: everyone is there at a predetermined time and the teacher is there to provide technical assistance right when the assistance is needed.

5. Course grades are determined through a system of evaluating student work individually and as a group where group work is undertaken. The two-tier system guards against "social loafing" (Aronson, 1978) that is prevalent in group work. Exams are up to the individual teacher. Aronson's ideas provide insight for this as well. I grade solely on

the work and effort students put into a variety of six course projects. Evaluation is based on portfolio assessment (Wolfe, 1989). This provides the student with an avenue to demonstrate their capability beyond two tests and a final (which, by the way, ignores the educational principle of assessing students through a wide variety of student generated work). It also puts into practice a method of student assessment many of the future teachers will be using when they are teachers themselves.

6. Project-based learning follows the thoughts of Bruner (1966) who suggested that students should be treated like the professionals they are aspiring to become. To this end, I consider my students teachers in training. Not students who are majoring in education but real teachers who are in but one phase of their teaching career. This mindset is invaluable to promoting student autonomy and responsibility while keeping the teacher focused on the goals that are to be accomplished. In treating students like the professionals they want to be, providing feedback becomes a crucial aspect of the classroom experience. In project-based learning students generate work similar to what educational psychologists or professors of education generate. Accordingly, I provide feedback similar to that which one colleague would extend to another. Think of your writing projects--books, conference papers, journal articles--the feedback you receive from reviewers or helpful cohorts are thoughtful, detailed, probing, questioning. In other

8

words, they are helping you to get across your intend as
clearly and as fluently as possible. I do this with
students. They respond with producing even better work
because the guidance they are getting provides them with
precisely what they need to flourish in their work. It is
absolutely essential that the feedback be po itive, positive,
positive. None of us respond well to negativity. Negativity
makes people defensive and keeps them from doing their best
work because they become more interested in protecting
themselves then taking the risks that excellence demands.
One more thought about feedback. I not only allow but
encourage "do-overs". When we, as professionals, produce our
work it is rarely the first effort that becomes the final
product. We work to improve and fine tune. How can we
expect students to get more proficient in their craft if the
process of feedback neglects to include the give and take of
communication between producer (student) and assistant
(teacher)? It cannot and it does not. This method of
providing feedback to students encourages growth; something
teachers definitely want to cultivate!

7. Teachers who wish to undertake project-based
learning must be committed to adapting and changing how their
courses are conducted from semester to semester. I teach
with course packets that I designed and developed. Every
semester I evaluate the contents, remove what is not used or
proves to be less than helpful. In the same way, I evaluate
the projects students complete. I remove what did not give

students the learning experience I was intending or I adjust
projects that prove to be helpful but would be even more
helpful with changes. In other words, keeping all aspects of
the course current keeps it more relevant and valuable for
students, and keeps the teacher current at the same time.
This is not as difficult or as time consuming as it seems.
Once the initial preparation for a course has been completed,
it is a matter of paying attention throughout the semester to
what is going on in the classroom, then taking a day at the
end of the semester to reorganize for the next semester.

A final word about project-based learning. This
approach to teaching emphasizes process, not product. For
students it promotes risk-taking, growth, confidence, and
competence. When teachers focus upon process that is
positive and affirming in helping students become the
professionals they are aspiring to be, the products students
generate are naturally the excellent, quality works that all
teachers hope for.

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