ABSTRACT

DISSERTATION TOPIC: Project-Based Learning: Stakeholders' Perceptions and Student

Achievement Impact

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Proponents of Project-Based Learning (PBL) claim that students gain a deeper

understanding of the concepts and standards, while building vital workplace skills. Claims are

also made that PBL allows students to address community issues, explore careers, interact with

adult mentors, use technology, and present their work to audiences beyond the classroom. PBL

advocates believe that PBL motivates students who might otherwise find school boring or

meaningless (Buck Institute for Education, 2011).

One purpose of this study was to examine the perceived differences between a PBL

classroom and those of a more traditional classroom. Another purpose of this study was to

discover which students, parents, and teachers chose PBL over the more traditional setting and

why they made that choice. Student achievement results of both methodologies were examined,

and stakeholders' perceptions surrounding PBL were collected, analyzed, and interpreted. The

goal was to contribute participants' perspectives for the benefit of scholars, administration,

teachers, parents, and students. The study also served to provide program evaluation data to the

school's leaders to guide future decision-making regarding PBL in the school and district.

A mixed-method approach employing both quantitative and qualitative research methods

was utilized in this study. The quantitative portion of this study focused on the analysis of student achievement data and a survey completed by students and parents. The survey provided information on those classroom features that were most and least valued by students and parents. Additionally, the survey provided a program review as the students and parents who had been involved in PBL provided their judgments about whether the program had met their expectations, compared to their traditional programming experiences. The analysis of the data suggested that there is no significant statistical difference between the two groups' results and there is no evidence to support PBL increased student achievement.

The qualitative part of this mixed-method research explored the participants' perspectives more deeply as it captured their goals, thoughts, and feelings surrounding both PBL and traditional educational approaches. With the use of interview processes, a deeper understanding of the perceptions of the participants was ascertained, which resulted in a richer output than just engaging in quantitative research alone. Preparation for the real world in which students compete for jobs was important to students and parents in both programs; however, perceptions varied about which type of programming led to this success. Educators agreed there were far more barriers than strengths to the implementation of PBL as the vision was embraced by few, had little staff buy-in and lacked quality training. Students and parents, who were in search of a different approach to learning, cared most about methodologies that honored student learning styles, embraced technology, and prepared students for the real world in working with people of different backgrounds and abilities.