Project-Based Learning:

Implementation in an Advanced Placement American Government Class

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Introduction

As an educator, I often reflect on my experience as a student to build upon the lessons and activities I found memorable. I can recollect, still, the projects that encouraged me to construct knowledge and develop an understanding of events and concepts. When I began teaching the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course, I was determined to apply those principles to my instructional methods. I believed projects could increase students' interest in the class, provide a new way for them to showcase their skills, and to investigate topics more in-depth.

This is a study of teacher enactment of a project-based learning task in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course. Social studies instruction has commonly been characterized by broad surveys of content that require students to aggregate and apply frivolous knowledge to lower level thinking tasks (Saye & Social Studies Inquiry Research Collaborative, 2013). As social studies teachers work to combat the perception of educating students through the memorization of facts and applying lower level thinking the inclusion of inquiry-based learning, such as project-based learning and problem-based learning should be included in the curriculum. According to Rossi (1995), even teachers who are motivated to use project-based methods face dilemmas in balancing contradictory beliefs about what is desirable, necessary, and possible as they seek to promote student inquiry in their classrooms.

I believe understanding the experience and perspectives of the implementing teacher has the potential to help inform educators. The new literature will help lead to the capability of improving the implementation and practice of project-based learning. Thornton (2017) has suggested, "we need more studies that focus behind the classroom door" (p. 33). This study helped answer that call by exploring the enactment of a project-based simulation.

Literature Review

Project-based Learning

Project-based learning has become a popular approach to instruction throughout social studies classrooms (Larmer, 2018; Lo, 2018). Teachers have noted that students have the ability to engage strongly, learn effectively, and find relevance in Advanced Placement coursework through project-based learning (Piper & Neufeld-Kaiser, 2018). As educators infuse project-based learning into Advanced Placement curriculum it is important to understand the planning, implementation, and reflections of the method.

To explore the project-based learning method, I have selected the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course because of the work of Parker and Lo. They created project-based learning tasks that have been researched and found to be successful in preparing students for the Advanced Placement exam and for developing learning skills (Parker & Lo, 2015).

Parker and Lo (2016) worked to develop an authentic assessment, the complex scenario test, to help determine if students learned the material deeply. The complex scenario test was used to measure the ability of student to apply the knowledge they learned in the course, this study was conducted in multiple school districts between 2007 and 2015 (Parker & Lo, 2016). The CST validity was determined by two panels of teachers, the first group of which had spent a

week scoring the test from across several schools in the district (Parker & Lo, 2016). The second group was composed of AP Government teachers who knew the content of the course very well but did not know the CST assessment (Parker & Lo, 2016). Both panels concluded the CST was a valid measure of deep and applied knowledge of the course content (Parker & Lo, 2016). PBL students in the high-achieving School A, scored significantly higher on three of the four dimensions of the CST as compared with students in the traditional course (Parker et al., 2011). The findings suggest that these PBL students deeply understood the AP content to the point that they were able to apply it in a situation to solve a complex problem (Parker et al., 2011). Meanwhile, Students in the PBL-AP classes scored significantly higher on the AP test than students in the comparison non-PBL courses (Parker et al., 2011). The results Parker and his team have shown using PBL in the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course have inspired me to adopt the five project-based learning simulations in my classes.

Using projects developed and shown to benefit students helps to add validity to my study. Lo (2018) points out that, "not all projects are created equal, and some projects may even feel like gimmicks that teachers use to break up the monotony of lectures and homework" (p. 18). Utilizing the projects that Parker and Lo have designed in my classroom provided high-quality project-based learning assignments that create valuable opportunities to explore teacher planning, implementation, and reflections. Despite the proclaimed success of these projects, teacher use and their reflections of using project-based methods is not fully known.

Simulations

Parker and Lo (2015) describe the elections project as a simulation of a presidential election and a scenario in which students wrestle with the master course question, What is the

proper role of government in a democracy? According to Parker (2018), simulations cultivate curriculum-focused experiential learning. Experiential learning such as place-based learning, simulations, and project-based learning applies the beliefs of Dewey (1938), in that education should be based on experiences of educational value. Educators have applied Dewey's ideas to project-based learning, a method that encourages students to investigate and demonstrate an understanding of curricular concepts (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010). According to Levin & Kawashima-Ginsberg (2017) simulations of adult civic roles is an effective practice for training young people to sustain democracy. The simulations encourage students to conduct investigations that relate to their lives (Piper & Neufeld-Kaiser, 2018).

The presidential election simulation tasks allow the students to become candidates, voters in swing states, journalists in media organizations, and leaders of interest groups and political parties. The project requires the students to run in the general election, learn about public opinion, political ideology, polls, campaign finance, and the voter characteristics. Through the simulation they also learn about the relationships between interest groups, political parties, and the media as they attempt to navigate and influence the campaign. After the students campaign and debate the students vote to elect the next president of the United States.

I explored the process of planning, integrating, conducting, and reflecting on the implementation of a project-based learning task in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course. I considered the environmental factors of the classroom and school that influenced enactment. The communication of my beliefs, skills, and life experiences provided an understanding of the elements that influenced my enactment of project-based learning.

Advanced Placement

Long considered an elite track for the most talented and ambitious students, AP classes are now seen as beneficial for any students willing to challenge themselves — and public high schools are increasingly treating access to them as a basic educational right (Watanabe, 2013). The number of students taking the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course has increased by at least five percent annually over the last 10 years (College Board, 2018). Yet, national pass rates in most Advanced Placement Social Studies courses are below 60% (College Board, 2018).

Due to the structure of AP courses, it would be easy for a teacher to practice pedagogy that reduces the course to the memorization of facts. I believe instructional methods in social studies courses must change, to provide memorable experiences that lead to growth and the development of skills that are useful beyond the classroom, and, I suspect project-based learning may be a method to help make this change. Pedagogical methods that provide opportunities for investigation, interpretation, and perspective are some of the goals of social studies (Barton & Levstik, 2015). Project-based learning provides an opportunity for students to investigate topics, interpret sources and develop a perspective.

The methods available to teach the Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course have expanded thanks to the contributions of Parker and Lo (2011, 2013, 2015, 2016). Parker and Lo (2016) have developed a project-based learning curriculum that drives the content of the course through five simulations. According to Parker (2018), simulations cultivate curriculum-focused experiential learning as students step into the shoes of candidates, journalist, campaign managers, lobbyists, and voters. These five projects have been tested and have shown promise in preparing students for the AP exam while providing deep learning opportunities

(Parker et al., 2011). The schools where the study was conducted showed equal or improved AP exam scores in comparison to companion schools who did not enact the PBL simulations (Parker et al., 2013).

I replicated these projects in the course I taught to provide the students with well-constructed simulations. Although many teachers use projects as a side dish or time filler (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010), project-based learning is a methodological approach to education that drives the curriculum of the course (Parker, 2018). Using the Elections project developed by Parker and Lo, I gathered information on teacher implementation and the reflections of the teacher.

Methods

I chose to use a qualitative approach with a descriptive case study strategy. A case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances (Stake, 1995). The selection of the case is instrumental and aimed to explore PBL from the perspectives of a teacher enacting the method in the class. Thomas (2016) states "an instrumental study is one that is done with a purpose in mind" (p. 120). This was a case of the implementation of a new method in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class.

Theoretical Framework

Kolb's theory of experiential learning was used to guide my enactment and reflection of my experiences in this study. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory is grounded heavily in the work of Dewey, which aligns with the focus on implementation and perceptions of project-based

learning. The main application of the theory was to manage and gain control of individual learning by inventing a learning style (Kolb, 1976). Kolb suggested experiential learning theory is a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior (1984). I utilized Kolb's experiential learning theory to guide the study with the key concentration on how PBL affects the teacher's perspectives of learning.

Kolb states that each of the phases of the model is a "different form of adaption to a learning model" (1971, p. 28). A separate individual ability corresponds to each phase of the model.

> Learners, if they are to be effective, need four different kinds of abilities- concrete experience abilities (CE), reflective observation abilities (RO), abstract conceptualizing abilities (AC) and active experimentation abilities (AE). That is they must be able to involve themselves fully, openly and without bias in new experiences (CE). They must be able to reflect on and observe their experiences from many perspectives (RO). They must be able to create concepts that integrate their observations into logically sound theories (AC) and they must be able to use these theories to make decisions and solve problems (AE) (Kolb, 1984, p. 30).

Through the lens of Kolb's experiential learning theory I examined the process of constructing a curriculum to address the four learning models and perceptions of the functionality of the task.

Research Question

The following question was explored:

1) How does a social studies teacher enact project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class?

Context

The context of the study was a large public high school in Florida; in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course. The school had a student population of 2,090 students (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). This is an average size in comparison to the other high schools in the district. Like the other schools in the district, the Advanced Placement courses at this school were open to any student wishing to take them. There was no screening process that could potentially restrict access or prohibit students who were reading below grade level from taking the course.

As educators are integrating new methods into Advanced Placement classes it is important to consider how each method addresses multiple learning styles. "By consciously following a recursive cycle of experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting, they can increase their learning power" (Kolb & Kolb, 2009, p. 297). The learning cycle should be embraced with the thought that each person can learn. When a concrete experience is enriched by reflection, given meaning by thinking, and transformed by action, the new experience created becomes richer, broader, and deeper (Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

Participants

I used narrative inquiry as the method to gather data. Narrative inquiry stresses the importance of the researcher as a participant, so I engaged my own story re-visioning experiences in this narrative inquiry as a full participant in the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2008). Teacher research directly addresses issues that teachers are concerned with because teachers focus on problems they identify, and it provides a means of enabling teachers to reflect on their own practice (Ellis, 1997).

When I conducted this study, I was starting my tenth school year as a social studies teacher in a public school. I loved the use of project-based learning and incorporated it throughout my career because I believe in the positive affect it had on student comprehension of material and the ability to enhance the learning experience. My personal experience with PBL began in middle school when several teachers provided opportunities to investigate material, make choices on how to present findings, and share my results with my peers. I enjoyed those classes and still remember many of the topics covered.

I believed in the method so much that I had designed five project-based learning tasks for the AP United States history course and used those the two previous school years. The investigation of project-based learning was the focal point of my graduate studies. The same year I collected the data for this study I completed the course work of the Ph.D. program in Curriculum and Instruction with a focus in Social Studies. Through course assignments I had become acquainted with education research that support project-based learning and the incorporation of active learning methods in social studies classrooms. The culmination of these experiences shaped my belief in the value and impact of project-based learning.

Data

To collect data on teacher enactment of PBL in an AP American Government and Politics class, I used narrative inquiry which, according to Clandinin and Connelly (2000), is a unique research approach positioned within the sphere of qualitative methodologies. Exclusive to narrative, methods of inquiry use the exploration of personal constructions of meaning through the production of coherent stories of experiences (Riessman, 2008).

According to Polkinghorne (1988), narrative is a fundamental scheme for linking individual actions and events into interrelated aspects of understandable composite, meaning individual human experience is the building block of organizational experience, culture, and outcomes. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) claim narrative inquiry is a product and a process. The end goal of narrative inquiry is the advancement of meaning (Clandinin & Huber, 2002).

To advance the meaning, I described the process of planning and implementation of project-based learning through stories. Phillion, He, and Connelly (2005) claim, the human experience is a perceived narrative that is best understood through the reconstruction of individual stories. Webster and Mertova (2007) communicate the belief, "stories are the substance of generations, history, and culture. They reflect our journey through life" (p.25). As I reflected on my journey through the inclusion of innovative pedagogy I added understanding to the phenomenon and method (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

Observations

"Observation is a key way to collect data" (Thomas, 2016, p. 196). I conducted video recorded observations three times. Because of my role as the teacher, I did not want to allow data recording to become distracting and potentially harmful to the learning outcomes of the students in my class and this provided an opportunity to reflect on my actions as the teacher in the class. I video recorded the class three times because I wanted to get an idea of what the students were doing on three different instructional days. The occurrences that I selected to conduct video recording were four types of learning style actions as identified in Kolb's learning style inventory. The four categories of actions I observed are diverging learners, assimilative learners, converging learners, and accommodating learners. This observation provided an opportunity to

evaluate the directions, tasks, and teacher response to student questions at multiple stages of the project-based learning task.

I collected video recorded observations in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics course during three class periods totaling 141 minutes. I kept a research journal and collected jottings and commentary notes every day for the entire length of the elections project unit. I estimated that this was a total of over 25 hours. During the Elections unit, I conducted jottings during each class period and, later that day, I added commentary.

Documents

I used the AP College Board course description documents to evaluate the lesson plans used in the class and to describe what was occurring in the lesson during observation periods. The AP College Board course description provided information about the key concepts required in the course. Reviewing this document and comparing it to my lesson plans provided an opportunity to evaluate the processes conducted prior to video recorded observations this allowed the inclusion of events that occurred prior to the study (Patton, 2015). I used the project descriptions and rubrics to help add clarity to the assignment the students were engaged in. The documents were used to provide a rich context for the study and evaluate information provided by my observations and reflections (Patton, 2002).

Analysis

The data pertaining to, teacher enactment of project-based learning in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class; the contextual factors that help shape how a social studies teacher implements PBL in instruction; how a teacher's beliefs, skills, and life

experiences influence enactment of PBL; how social and environmental factors of the classroom and school influence enactment; the way in which a teacher applies PBL principles in planning for instruction; and how a teacher implements PBL-aligned instructional approaches into the AP American Government and Politics curriculum were analyzed through description and examples. Webster and Mertova (2007) claim, "results should be described in a way that will allow a reader to revisit extracts of collected stories, to facilitate their own conclusions and understanding of the research data" (p. 109). Stories were supported with examples that were contextually situated to help bring understanding to events. Lyons and LaBoskey (2002) claim, researchers interrogate their teaching practices to construct the meaning and interpretation of some puzzling aspect of teaching through the construction of narratives that lead to understanding. That narrative was coded and arranged in common themes. According to Creswell (2007), "Analyzing qualitative data involves reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing the codes, and finally representing the data in figures, tables, or a discussion" (p. 148).

As I found patterns that emerged I communicated that understanding from my perspective of the teacher enacting PBL in an Advanced Placement American Government and Politics class.

I employed constant comparative analysis as I analyzed the data collected.

> In the constant comparative method the researcher simultaneously codes and analyses data in order to develop concepts; by continually comparing specific incidents in the data, the researcher refines these concepts, identifies their properties, explores their relationship to one another, and integrates them into a coherent explanatory model (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 126).

According to Thomas (2016), the basic principle of constant comparison is that the research emerges with themes to capture the data.

As I used axial coding, I use memos to help organize my thoughts. I used selective coding to determine a core category to validate the construction of themes. Selective coding is the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, validating those relationships, and filling in categories that need refinement and development (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Documents such as lesson plans, project rubrics, homework assignments, and required readings were examined and analyzed to gain a better understanding of the experience of enacting PBL in the class. Saldaña (2009) noted descriptive coding is appropriate for documents and artifacts as a detailed inventory of their contents. Through content analysis, I looked for patterns in the data (Patton, 2002). The analysis involved noting key words and topics related to my research questions.

Ethical Considerations

The Economic and Social Research Council has identified six key principles it expects to be addressed when possible (ESRC, 2005). (1) Research should be designed, reviewed and undertaken to ensure integrity, quality, and transparency. (2) Staff and participants must be informed fully of the purpose, methods, and intended possible uses of the research, what participation in the research entails and what risks, are involved. (3) Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents must be respected. (4) Participants must be voluntary. (5) Harm to participants should be avoided at all costs. (6) Conflicts of interest should be explicit (ESRC, 2005). I followed the six key principles through the course of the study to address the ethical concerns of this study.

Findings

       Considering the first stage of Kolb's theory concrete experience this study provided the opportunity to involve myself in the enactment of a project-based learning task in an AP American Government and Politics course. The second stage of Kolb's theory abstract conceptualizing requires the conceptualization of observations and theory. The scholarship of educators who have enacted PBL tasks was considered in the planning of the project enactment. The third stage of Kolb's theory reflective observation requires the consideration of multiple perspectives. I believe this study will help provide a perspective of the enactment of the simulation projects designed by Parker and Lo (2011) for the AP American Government and Politics course. The themes that emerged were the need of alignment of project tasks to key concepts, flexibility of project tasks and time constraints, and the importance of effective communication with stakeholders. Increasing the scholarship will help add valuable knowledge to the field and can help provide an insight into the experience of enacting a PBL task in an AP American Government and Politics course. The final stage of Kolb's theory, Active experimentation requires the use of theory to make decisions and solve problems. Through the narrative description of how I identified challenges and the decisions I made to enact the project will inform others of the challenges and success I had.

Alignment

       Larmer (2018) claims project-based learning should be designed around a challenging problem or question. "Today's standards call for more than teaching factual knowledge and discreet skills" (Larmer, 2018, p. 20). Halvorsen, Duke, Brugar, Block, Strachan, Berka, and

Brown (2012) communicated the need for "aligning project-based units to specific learning standards" (p. 204). Because AP courses have a large amount of curriculum to cover and a limited time to do so, every task had to be purposeful. I evaluated the key concepts that were provided by the College Board and read the description of the Elections project that Parker and Lo (2015) provided. I then planed the unit by aligning key concepts for each project task.

After reading the description of the five tasks identified by Parker and Lo in the Elections project, I had an idea of the major elements of the project. I searched for a key concept related to the project and identified PRD-2.A to be relevant. PRD-2.A states, "Explain how the different processes work in a U.S. presidential election" (College Board, 2018, p. 16). I developed a more detailed description of what I required my students to do. Each student would participate in the primary campaign by presenting his perspective on five political issues the students selected. I wanted my students to understand the presidential election occurs in several stages. I wanted every student to participate in the primary election because it would require them to campaign and prepare for a debate. I wanted to narrow the field by reducing the student participants to two nominees from each class to symbolize the candidate who drops out of a race. The participation of two candidates in a class debate simulated the process of a candidate winning the party nomination. The final debate between the nominee of fifth and sixth-period classes symbolized the presidential debate.

To address key concept PRD-2.D that states, "explain how campaign organizations and strategies affect the election process" (College Board, 2018, p. 37) I required each student to create a campaign advertisement. Most students created several posters to hang in my classroom, but students were encouraged to use any form of media they chose. As students conducted their campaigns it allowed a discussion to develop in class that related to key concept PRD-2.D.1, the

benefits, and drawbacks of modern campaigns are represented by: dependence on professional consultants; rising campaign costs and intensive fundraising efforts; duration of election cycles; impact of and reliance on social media for campaign communication; and fundraising (College Board, 2018, p. 37). The project exposed the students to the difficulty of campaigning and why a candidate would hire a professional consultant. The students were required to buy any items for the project, they wished which helped the students understand the need to fundraise.

Because I required the students to vote in the primary election and allowed them to select any candidate they chose it helped the students cover a part of key concept PRD-2.A.1 that focuses on open and closed primaries. Key concept PRD-2.A.1 states, "the process and outcomes in U.S. presidential elections are impacted by: incumbency advantage phenomenon, open and closed primaries, caucuses, party conventions, Congressional and State elections, and The Electoral College" (College Board, 2018, p. 37). After the students voted I was able to provide them an example of how a closed primary would have changed the process of the election in our class.

Students who did not advance as nominees to the presidential election were assigned an additional task to create an article on a political viewpoint of a nominee still in the race. This task addressed key concept PRD-3: "the various forms of media provide citizens with political information and influence the ways in which they participate politically" (College Board, 2018, p. 38). The student completed a gallery walk to read the articles other students produced on the actions and benefits of the presidential nominees which activity helped address the key concept

PRD-3.B: "explain how increasingly diverse choices of media and communication outlets influence political institutions and behavior" (College Board, 2018, p. 38).

After I announced the presidential nominee to the few students who remained in class after the bell, I noticed they texted and sent Instagram messages to other members of the class with the results. When the students arrived in class the next day the class already knew who the presidential nominee was, and their actions provided an opportunity to explain key concept PRD-3.A.1. PRD-3.A.1 states, "traditional news media, new communication technologies, and advances in social media have profoundly influenced how citizens routinely acquire political information, including new events, investigative journalism, election coverage, and political commentary" (College Board, 2018, p. 38).

I exposed students to key concept PMI-5.F: "explain how variation in types and resources of interest groups affects their ability to influence elections and policy making" (College Board, 2018, p. 37). Through the creation of a lobbyist proposal, I created the task to provide students with an opportunity to influence the election and understand the importance of issue advocacy. The implementation of this task needs to be reordered because of the way the project flowed. It did not allow students to influence elections.

Through my experience it became clear that each task had to be aligned to a key concept. When planning, instructional days were quickly filled with project tasks and with the wide scope of the course I had to be intentional in the lesson for each day. On a few occasions I would have liked to have devoted additional days to cover more content. Devoting additional time to campaign finance reform and the roles of lobbyist are an example of curriculum I had to allow the students to explore independently in order to conduct the Elections simulation in an amount of time that did not negatively impact other sections of the course.

Flexibility

The second theme that emerged was the need to be flexible. It is important to realize no project will ever be perfect and adjustments will need to be made in advance of enactment, during, and after. The research of Halvorsen and colleagues (2018) "found that teachers made their own modifications to unit plans that appeared to help them effectively teach" (p. 61). The lesson plans I completed in July helped me develop project tasks related to key concepts. During the enactment of the Elections project, it became necessary to modify those lesson plans. According to Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, Bransford, Berliner, Cochran-Smith, and McDonald (2005), the ultimate aim is for teachers to become "flexible adapters" of the curriculum, making changes that embody the design principles and meeting the specific needs of their students (p. 363). My students were able to participate in two great opportunities that directly related to the project the week before introduction because I adjusted my lesson plans. My students were able to learn from the campaign experiences of Kathleen Peters and then board the C-SPAN bus to learn about the role of the media in campaigns.

The volunteer coordinator scheduled Florida House representative Kathleen Peters to speak to my class days prior to starting the unit on campaigns. Ms. Peters communicated her strategy on campaigns, actions she took as a politician, and the role she can play as a leader in the community. The experience directly related to the topic the students were studying, and it provided a first-hand account of participation in elections. This experience would not have been possible if I had to follow the lesson plan, I had established in prior weeks. The flexibility to rearrange content and to modify plans provided my students with a powerful experience. Other writers and researchers have suggested the importance of making changes to the curriculum to

benefit learning. For example Phillips (2018), claimed the adjustments the teachers made to the curriculum led to "a deeper and richer understanding of the content by the students" (p. 108).

The need to remain flexible resurfaced only three days later when the C-SPAN bus visited my school. The purpose of the bus was to generate viewership for the C-SPAN network, but the staff provided important information on the role of the media in politics, and specifically elections. My students benefited from the experience as they considered how news corporations generate revenue and the value of nonbiased media. My students were able to participate in this event because I adjusted lesson plans and merged the material I was going to cover in two days into one lesson.

After introducing the project, I decided to move a scheduled project work day back a day to allow the students to complete a lesson on presidential campaign ads. This was necessary because after three days my students had not developed campaign ads and I believed they needed information that would help them develop their advertisements. Viewing the video clips of historical presidential campaigns exposed students to strategies they could apply to their campaigns.

In order to provide more flexibility later in the unit, I combined the lesson plans I had for the 10th and 11th instructional day. I believed the reinforcement activities could be shortened allowing the concepts from each day to be introduced in one lesson. I took the same action to combine the lessons I had planned for the 14th and 15th instructional days. Combining lessons allowed me to create two instructional days; one that would compensate for a day previously used for an additional debate day and the other that would provide a project work day later in the unit. I was able to foresee the need for students to work in class to complete the final tasks of the

project. I identified the need by reviewing the amount of work my students completed for the first tasks of the project independently.

Combining lessons created flexibility through the establishment of additional instructional days and changing the order of tasks was equally important. After I introduced the project, I believed my students needed an immersive experience to identify the concepts associated with an election and campaigns. I decided to move the lesson plan I had constructed for the third day of the unit to the second day to provide the students an opportunity to play the game, *Win the White House*. This experience helped the students understand the multiple elements of campaigning and simulated the process they would simulate as part of the project.

Larmer (2018) communicated the importance of providing students with a voice and some choice in project-based learning tasks. During the first day of debate the students were actively engaged and spoke on the topic longer than I anticipated. I adjusted the schedule once more to allow the students to continue the debate the following day. Once again I adjusted my lesson plans, combining two lessons that allowed me to move the presidential debate and election day earlier in the unit than what I had scheduled in July. The presidential debate was conducted after school of the 12th instructional day. Moving this task up four instructional days allowed the president to play a role in the lobbyist proposal task.

Beyond including unforeseen education events into my course, flexibility remained essential. As I explained the tasks required, the students asked me to consider using a different method that would allow them to voice their opinions more frequently. I utilized the students' request to amend the project and provided a more appealing debate format for the students.

When the class voted for its nominee to represent the class and two candidates were tied, I arranged an additional debate to determine the party nominee. The adjustments helped the students to feel more included in the process, and in control of the project. The adjustments I made, allowed the project to seem more authentic and also helped to maintain the interest of the students.

Communication

The third theme that emerged was the importance of communicating with the administrative team at the school and the students in my class. According to Johnson, Whittington, and Scholes (2011), managerial discourse can play a large role in innovation and enacting change in an educational setting. I found it valuable to know the administrators who would be evaluating me knew about project-based learning. The first year I enacted the five simulations developed by Parker and Lo (2015) the assistant principal who oversaw my department visited my classroom weekly. The frequency of observations and walkthroughs comforted me because the total collection of what she saw reinforced her belief that the students were learning content, and they were doing it in a fun and memorable way.

Communication was enhanced through my ability to align project tasks and key concepts in the enactment of the Elections project. Time is a scarce resource in my class and having a purposeful pedagogy justified the time required for the project. Swan and colleagues (2018) claim "inquiry necessarily takes longer than direct instruction and this can be problematic for teachers struggling at find time to cover the breadth of content outlined in most social studies courses" (p. 133).

The alignment of project tasks and AP key concepts enhanced communication with administrators and students. I was fortunate to have an opportunity to meet with two assistant principals in the spring prior to planning my course. In the meeting, we discussed our thoughts on effective instructional methods and active student learning and I was able to communicate how project-based learning tasks could address standards within the prescribed curriculum in a way I believed was more memorable. Both administrators promoted project-based learning and were supportive of my ideas of enacting project-based learning in my AP courses. Their positive reinforcement and encouragement inspired me to enact more PBL tasks in my courses.

According to the research of Kawashima-Ginsberg and Junco (2018) "teachers who perceived more support from their district were more likely to promote student voice and to have more positive feelings about classroom deliberations" (p. 325). The summer following my discussion with the two assistant principals, one of them was promoted to the principal position. In July, I was able to review my students' results on the AP exam. The students' scores on the AP exam were lower than in years prior, so I emailed my principal to share the results and ask her perspective of the continuation of project-based learning. I asked if she would prefer that I devote more instructional time to teacher-led work and reduced the number of projects. Her response was to keep using innovative methods in my classroom that help all students master difficult material. Eisner (1974) communicated the importance of the attitude and educational values of the leader of the school and how their attitude serves as a role for teachers to emulate. My principal communicated her belief in the effectiveness of project-based learning and thanked me for working to support the students at the school. As a result, I felt supported and motivated to continue to use PBL in my AP classes.

After I received the principal's email, I emailed the assistant principal who evaluates me. I communicated my desire to continue to use project-based learning in my classroom and that I would hold students more accountable for their work to raise their AP scores. Once I returned to school in the fall I met with the assistant principal and spoke to her about the projects I had planned for the school year and how each project related to AP key concepts. She was receptive to the ideas I communicated and confirmed her belief in student-centered work. I started the school year with the support and understanding of the administration. This reduced my worries about justifying project workdays if an administrator would happen to enter my classroom during the year. Eisner (1974) wrote about what a person might observe in an inquiry-based classroom claiming one might have "a difficult time locating the teacher" and they might hear "a hum of activity, noisier than the more traditional classroom" (p. 24). Because I knew the methods, I chose to use in my class would be supported I was less worried about portraying my class as well organized or teacher-led.

Effective communication was helpful in improving the enactment of the Elections project with administrators but even more essential in the communication with the students in the class. I wanted the students to have a clear understanding of the tasks required for the project. To communicate the project goals, I printed each student a descriptive rubric and projected it on the Smartboard. As each student reviewed the rubric, I read each item to the class, provided examples, and answered any questions. Strutchens and Martin (2017) write about the importance of setting clear learning goals and communicating them effectively. I referenced the rubric two other times during the course of the project. As the students focused on different project tasks, I reviewed each element and checked for understanding. During project work days I projected the rubric on the front board.

I believe I was effective in communicating the required tasks of the project to the students and my communication with the students expanded beyond the required tasks. I took time twice a week to ask the students how the project was going, what they needed, and what I could do to help. Eisner (1974) claims that teaching is "an educational venture; it had to do with motivation" (p. 26). I had frequent opportunities to motivate students and to answer questions, and many students took advantage of these opportunities. Some of the students would ask for clarification of the task. For example, one student asked, whether he needed one poster or two. Several students communicated the need to work on the project in class because they wanted to see if their ideas for campaign ads were funny. Rarely, a student would directly ask for help; so, engaging in a conversation about the project with each student helped me identify ways I could help each one.

Through open communication with the students, I was able to identify their needs and act accordingly. The open communication in the class between the students and the teacher was enhanced through intentional activities to encourage dialogue. I used an activity I called Mental health Monday to encourage the students to communicate their thoughts or ideas to the class. I proposed a question to the class and each student responded. This opportunity allowed me to learn more about each student and the students learned more about each other. Dabach and colleagues (2018) communicate the importance of cultivating personal relationships to create an open dialogue in the classroom. Fostering relationship building through communication was essential for this project because the students were required to communicate with the class in the debates.

The ability to maintain flexibility, cross reference project tasks and key concepts, and effectively communicate were essential steps of enactment of project-based learning in my AP

American Government and Politics course. I had to be willing to adjust my lesson plans to suit the needs of my students, and to take advantage of educational opportunities like C-SPAN. Aligning project tasks with key concepts helped identify important elements to teach the students and justify spending instructional time on the project. Through clear communication with the administration and students, I was able to receive the support I needed and provide my students with the support they required to enact project-based learning.

Discussion and Implications

Beliefs of the Teacher

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the actions of a teacher who enacted PBL in an AP American Government and Politics. One of the key findings of the study was the importance of personal beliefs on the enactment process. My beliefs as a teacher cultivated my understanding of what curriculum and instruction should look like in a social studies class. I invested time, energy, and financial resources to enhance my education to equip myself with the skills necessary to develop and enact PBL opportunities.

Discussions and communication were reinforced by research I conducted to become more knowledgeable on the method and the adaption of the Elections simulation to my class. My beliefs fueled my desire to plan the unit, which is known to be a painstaking endeavor. I was motivated to scaffold instruction appropriately, provide students opportunities to construct meaning from the material through formative assessments, and provide students with choices to direct their own learning.

My decision to enact PBL in my AP American Government and Politics course was not because it was easy, or it would be fun, but because I believed it was the way to provide students with an appropriate education that would teach the key concepts from the AP College Board in a way that would become indelible and enhance their academic experience. Borko and Shavelson (1990) found teachers' decisions are affected by several factors that influence their decision-making including information about students, nature of instructional tasks, the context of instruction, and teacher characteristics. Ruppar, Gaffney, and Dymond (2015) specifically addressed the importance of teacher characteristics claiming, "relationships among teachers' beliefs and contexts were dynamic, and teachers' self-efficacy provided a key link between beliefs and contexts in influencing decisions" (p. 221).

Implementation of Project-based Learning

Utilizing methods to teach social studies should feature an opportunity for students to learn to analyze, evaluate, and effectively participate in our political and social systems (Parker, 2008). Through the incorporation of PBL in the AP American Government and Politics, course students had an opportunity to achieve the goals Parker (2008) communicated.

The findings of this study could assist principals and school districts by providing professional development that provide instruction to educators on the essential elements of enacting project-based learning. According to the research of Shulman (2004), asking teachers to implant complex practices requires ongoing and responsive professional development. This research can help identify elements essential to the enactment of project-based learning.

Common Core

The Common Core State Standards were developed to create one set of challenging academic expectations for all students to help improve achievement and college readiness (Gewertz, 2019). The Common Core standards are descriptions of the skills students should have at each grade level in mathematics and English language arts upon the completion of high school (Gewertz, 2019). Three of the English language arts standards required for high school juniors and seniors are:

> CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1
> Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.
>
> CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2
> Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
>
> CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.3
> Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2019).

These and the other standards emphasize students' ability to read complex literary and informational texts and cite evidence from them in constructing arguments and interpretations (Gewertz, 2019). The required standards are a logical inclusion to the curriculum taught to equip students with the skills necessary to function as a contributing member of society.

The Common Core standards were officially launched in 2009, at that time all but four states embraced the standards (Gewertz, 2019). In 2010, Florida Governor Jeb Bush, embraced the standards as a way make education more rigorous and set a higher bar for students (Camera, 2019). Recently elected Florida Governor DeSantis signed an executive order to eliminate the

last vestiges of Common Core (Bland, 2019). Opponents od Common Core argue the standards ushered in an era of intense standardized testing that allowed little time for non-core subjects, like music, art, and civics (Camera, 2019). Due to numerous variables and debatable definition of success, it is hard to determine if the effect of the enactment of the Common Core standards. DeSantis claimed, "Common Core has failed teachers, parents, and our children" (Camera, 2019, p. 1). DeSantis followed that claim by stating, "We will streamline standardized testing, make civics a priority in schools and increase the literacy rate" (Camera, 2019, p. 1). I think teaching to improve the literacy rate and teaching civics in schools is essential to develop informed democratic citizens, but I am concerned with how civics will be taught in the wake of the elimination of the Common Core standards.

Civic Education

When I hear people talk about streamlining testing my thoughts shift to the implementation of a multiple-choice test. The summative assessment is easy to administer and requires less time to grade than most other forms of assessment, thus making it a low-cost option. I believe in order to enact a purposeful and meaningful civics course we must infuse the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for the Social Studies State Standards.

The C3 Framework was developed to enhance the rigor of the social studies disciplines, build critical thinking, problem-solving, and participatory skill to become engaged citizens, and align academic programs to the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts in Literacy in History/Social Studies (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). The C3 Framework emphasizes the acquisition and application of knowledge through four dimensions

constructed to spark curiosity, guide instruction, deepen investigations, acquire rigorous content, and apply knowledge to become active and engaged citizens in the 21st century (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). The four dimensions of the C3 Framework include the development of questions and planning inquiries, the application of disciplinary tools and concepts, the evaluation of sources and use of evidence, and the ability to communicate and take informed action (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013).

This infusion of civic concepts and academic rigor has been acknowledged and encouraged by the Civic Learning Impact and Measurement Convening Report (CivXNow, 2019). This group of professors, teachers, and community leaders discussed the development of a roadmap to help improve civic education in the United States. The CivXNow group communicated their thoughts on the current state of civics education in the following statement,

> Today, the opportunities to engage in civic life in and around schools are insufficient and not available equitably. The goal is then to ensure that the institutions tasked with promoting civic outcomes must attend to youth interests and their lived experiences while also developing their civic knowledge, skills, and commitments. Because young people exposed to high quality civic learning are significantly more likely to contribute to civic life and vote, we must resolve to expand opportunities for all of them (CivXNow, 2019, p. 10).

I believe teachers should use project-based learning methods to engage students in the acquisition of skills and content knowledge to help develop informed democratic citizens. The Elections simulation increased my students' content knowledge and helped them develop skills for the 21st century. Above all other academic gains, the most significant outcome was the ability of the students to conduct research, become informed on issues, support their thoughts, discuss and debate issues with their peers in a respectful way, and consider the perspectives of others. Educational opportunities like this should be applied across the country.

Recommendations

In addition to implementing project-based learning opportunities in civics courses I recommend improved communication and promoting effective leaders to the department chair position. A school-wide effort should be made by the administration team and faculty members to identify a time to discuss the enactment of new methods in the curriculum. Administration and district leaders should provide comprehensive training that equips educators with the skills and understanding to correctly enact new methods. Through the effective use of department meetings, educational leaders who portray a growth mindset could have a positive effect on the department. The department chair should be communicating new ideas, methods, resources, and modeling techniques to the department. This effective leadership would expose others to possibilities and would have the potential of transforming education in each department.

Future Research

Since this case study was conducted using narrative inquiry of one teacher-researcher experiences at one high school in the southwestern region of Florida, it is recommended that, in order to allow for a greater generalization of the result, a research case study using a larger sample size in different regions of the country should be conducted. This case study explored the perspectives of four veteran AP students who held overall grade point averages above a 3.88, at one high school. In order to allow for greater generalization, the sample size should be increased and include students from multiple classes throughout the country.

Exploring the perspectives of first-year AP students who were exposed to PBL would be valuable. It would be worth researching the effect PBL had on students adjusting to the rigorous curriculum. The study could provide research that may identify obstacles, challenges, or success

first year AP students had using PBL methods. Some researchers have argued that PBL was more appropriate for gifted learners and not a proven instructional strategy for struggling learners (Mergendoller, Maxwell, & Bellisimo, 2006). Scholars such as Diffily (2002) have argued that, "Project-based learning was particularly suited to the needs of gifted children" (p. 40). Conducting research with first time AP students would increase the literature of PBL methods with a more diverse group of students.

Conducting a study to determine the methods used by administrators, district leaders, and methods instructors to equip educators with the skills to enact project-based learning would be a valuable contribution to the literature. Avery et al. (2002) found that exceptional professional development sessions dedicated to authentic instruction helped teachers to utilize new methods. Through additional research, it could be possible to identify procedures that would help educators have more success enacting PBL in their classrooms.

Conclusion

At the outset of this study I was interested to learn the perspectives of students who experienced PBL as a method used to teach key concepts to prepare for the AP American Government and Politics exam. As the students participated in the Elections project, they communicated advantageous experiences such as increased interest in the course, improved motivation, increased opportunities to learn with and from their peers, the opportunity to communicate their beliefs, listen to others, and reevaluate their own positions.

My understanding of PBL was enhanced through the experience of reflecting on the process and considering the factors of the enactment of a new method. It became clear that my beliefs played a seminal role in the selection of methods to use in the classroom. I identified the

importance of communication, alignment of tasks to key concepts, and flexibility as essential parts of enactment. The study confirmed my belief in the benefits of using PBL in the AP American Government and Politics course. Beyond teaching the curriculum I experienced what I perceive to be an effective way to teach civics. Students should be encouraged to conduct research, share their perspectives, consider the thoughts of others, and discuss issues in a respectful manor, if we can enact these things in our classrooms maybe we can improve civics in America.

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