Module 4 reflection

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EDTECH 504

When I began my research, I chose to look at Problem Based Learning (PBL) because I thought it fit in well with what I teach in the classroom. I use a project-based curriculum that has the students focus on solving problems. I found the PBL method difficult to wrap my head around for the use in a high school class.

A specific problem that I found was how to incorporate direct instruction into the lessons. What I discovered was that the direct learning should come at the hands of the students. My place in this type of learning was to be a mentor or facilitator. Typically I would introduce a topic, followed by practice problems, and finally a problem that they could solve using their new knowledge. I had assumed that I was following the PBL method. What I found was that I was only using part of the method.

The students need to have a “messy” problem to solve initially. I was giving the problem that had a specified path. The problem needs to be authentic to the learner. My problems generally were given to the students rather than them coming up with it themselves. At times they have learning moments, but they are generally not required to diagnose their learning deficiencies. Ultimately I was still a presenter of information rather than a guide that helps them find resources.

I still plan on having direct instruction as well as problems to solve, but I intend to have students come up with a comprehensive problem that they have a personal connection with.

There are various web 2.0 tools available on the Internet that I plan to use to help students with their collaboration. I currently use Edmodo to facilitate getting information out to students, but it does not allow for students to communicate with each other directly. I need to look for a tool that will allow the students to communicate across classes and even across schools. My district has three high schools, and they offer my class to all three. If I can allow my students to collaborate across schools, there is great potential for them creating a high quality problem that has relevance to them that they can work together to solve themselves.

Another issue that came up when I was researching PBL is the lack of understanding of the mechanics of the method. As I have discussed the method with teachers in my school, it has become apparent that there is a misunderstanding of what PBL means. Commonly the misunderstanding is aligned with my initial thoughts of presenting information to students and then having them solve a problem. I have also heard it referred to as Project based learning in my school. The PBL method has much more depth than this. Students are genuinely tasked with learning their own material and the teacher is more of a guide or resource for the learner.

As an instructional coach in my school, I have been tasked often with discussing the various aspects of PBL. I feel like I had many of the same misconceptions of the topic that my teachers were coming to me with. In my research, I have gained a deeper knowledge of PBL and I feel confident that I can coach teachers on PBL. There are many different types of learning theories, but Problem Based Learning seems to have the strongest appeal for teachers trying to foster critical thinking and problem solving.