Abstract

The goal of the Community Service Learning project was to develop PBL methods with an emphasis on 3 target habits of mind: critical thinking, collaboration, and personal reflection. These habits of mind focused on applying previous knowledge, listening and understanding, and cultivating joy in the classroom. This manifested into an afterschool “Game Club” where students are given a safe place to share a common interest with their peers. Built on the 7 essential PBL design elements, students were able to join construct the club and its rules and goals. For some club members, since the clubs inception, significant improvement in the classroom can be seen. Additionally students have expressed interest in game development and computer programming. For these students, I have been developing a curriculum on “serious gaming” where students can learn the fundamentals of coding and trouble shooting.

Introduction

Community Service Learning (CSL) involves the action and reflection of students with a goal of a deep understanding. Through this process students become better learners and active members of a community. PBL was used as an outline for the project, focusing on the 7 Essential Design Elements. Several students in 8th grade Science struggled with confidence and comfort in the classroom. It appears that by 8th grade, many students who struggle feel locked in that role. Three Habits of Mind were selected as a focus with a goal of creating a discourse with these students to foster a more welcoming classroom community.

The first step was integrating interests into the classroom. The classroom because their culture is present, acknowledged, and recognized as having value in the artifacts of the class and the examples that are used in lessons. At the very least, they experience curiosity and respect for their cultural norms and values. Students seemed to express interest in video games and super heroes, among other interests. I then implemented games into a lesson plan on Natural Selection, as well as super heroes into a lesson on genetic mutations. Where there was positive student feedback from both lessons, I saw an increase in interest and serious student participation during these lessons.

A student approached me requesting to have some kind of video game club.

There can be several benefits of hosting such a club, as emphasized here in an excerpt of a dissertation by Nick Lenk, a pioneer of the video game club “Afterschool Games.”

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The following is an outline of the project including the Habits of Mind, 7 Essential Elements, and the Results.

Target Habits of Mind

“A habit of mind is a composite of many skills, attitudes, cues, past experiences, and proclivities.” The goal is to enhance a students ability to produce knowledge and ideas rather than simply reproducing it. The following are the 3 Habits of Mind selected for the project. The target group of students are students that struggle in these particular areas.

- Applying past knowledge to new situations: use what you know! Relating new ideas to ideas you are familiar with
- Listening with understanding and empathy: understanding others through productive conversations between students and teachers
- Finding humor: cultivating joy in the classroom through cultural references

Results

The club is made up of 20 7th and 8th grade students of varying game experience. 12 of these students are in my 8th grade General Science course, I was able to track the academic progress of these students.

First, I utilized collaborative Rule Building grounded in school policy that has been outlined in the handbook. (Figure 1) There was some freedom here because this is an afterschool program. The students were allowed to use terms they associate with. Rule number 1 translates to having a positive attitude and using respectful language. Rule number 2 is in regards to good sportsmanship. Rule 3 is simply being respectful of others’ belongings including gaming equipment.

When implementing Habits of Mind, anecdotal and observational data showed an improvement teamwork, communication, and attitude. In Figure 2 students can see playing heroes on the projector. Many of the games require teamwork, effective communication, and complex analysis based on accumulated and shared knowledge. A positive change in attitude was seen in the classroom and for several students this was reflective of their change in grade average. (Chart 1) A few club members expressed interest in game development and computer programming. This led me towards the development of a unit on coding based on serious gaming. These students have begun to take the time in the club playing games which are based on fundamentals of coding and building comfort trouble shooting.

Figure 1. “Game Club Rules” Figure 2. Students playing Game Cube on the Projector

Chart 1. Club Member grades Pre Vs. Post Club Implementation

7 Essential Design Elements

With the implementation of a game club in the school, several benefits can be seen. The following are the 7 Essential Design Elements, which are based on fundamentals of coding and building comfort trouble shooting.

1. Critical thinking: Being able to reason and solve problems logically.
2. Collaboration: Working together to achieve a goal.
3. Personal Reflection: Being able to reflect on one’s own experiences and learning.
4. Authenticity: Creating a learning environment that is relevant and meaningful to students.
5. Student Voice and Choice: Allowing students to have a say in their learning.
6. Sustained Inquiry: Encouraging students to continue learning and exploring new ideas.
7. Integration of Student Interest Into Learning: Linking students’ interests to the curriculum.

Conclusion

Integration of Student Interest Into Learning

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REFERENCES

1. Nick Lenk, Ph.D. www.videogameclubs.org