



The teachers expanded their traditional study of ancient Egypt to include a P-BL exploration of post-Arab Spring Egypt through P-BL. Students determined much of the project requirements, including the final debate.

Teachers: Anita Hall, Beth Keough, and Chris McCarthy.

Project Consultants: Cindy DiDonato and William Oehlkers.

Teacher 1: I think the biggest thing I learned is what 6th graders are capable of doing. I am totally astounded by that.

THEY ROSE TO THE OCCASION

Teacher 2: To see what the kids were able to do, the setting the expectations...they really rose to the occasion. And the kids never really seemed doubtful because our expectation was there – it was high – and we gave them the confidence to be able to rise up. But it was just amazing to see where the kids had come in such a short time

Cindy: Can you compare what was gained and what was lost while working with P-BL? Were they more engaged?

GAINS BUT NO LOSSES

Teacher 2: Definitely. I think that abandoning part of our ancient Egypt unit, bringing them to the current century FAR outweighed what we could have gotten through with them with the ancient part. We covered the ancient Egyptian Civilization – and I hate that word “covered” but - we did – but I think what they gained from knowing currently what’s happening was so much more powerful for them.

CLOSER TO LEARNING THE STANDARDS

Teacher 1: It’s also bringing us closer to where we have to be as far as the standards – the GSE’s (Rhode Island Department of Education Grade Span Expectations). The Social Studies teachers – they’re very reluctant to move out of the ancient civilizations and we have been too – it’s been our comfort zone – and it’s enjoyable – and it’s fun - but we needed to move out and this was a great way. We had to get into Civics in order to fully develop these ideas. And we had to look at the influence of other kinds of ruling societies and looking at different kinds of government. And that’s what we are supposed to be doing.

I’ve had kids - ever since we started Ancient Greece, asking “Are we going to take it to modern day Greece?” They already want to know. They are already thinking and they were already in the mindset of “OK – now what am I going to bring to this? How am I going to control my learning?” So they are already seeing the empowerment.

Cindy: And what did you gain?

KIDS DRIVE THEIR OWN EDUCATION





Teacher 3: For me – the opportunity for these kids to drive their own education – answer their own questions - embrace what it is they are learning at whatever pace that they can learn it.

Teacher 1: And we got excited too!

Teacher 3: Oh my god – yes!

Teacher 2: But you know what, I think the biggest thing that the kids got out of this is the empowerment. We reminded them that “you came up with this question. We were just here to merely observe.” They really did feel a part of what they did – and they still feel empowered.

ACTIVE PARTICIPANTS IN LEARNING

Teacher 1: Oh absolutely. One student in particular I don't think would be the same student that he is right now if it he hadn't gone through this unit, this PBL. He was an active participant in his learning for I think probably the first time. And it hasn't stopped. He continues to be reflective. I've reminded him “Are you an active participant?” And he'll go “Yes, yes, I am.”

PARENT EXCITEMENT

Teacher 3: I ran into his parent a week ago and his father said, “I don't know what you did with my child but he is a different boy.”

SHY GIRLS GAIN CONFIDENCE

Teacher 1: There were shy girls doing things – they were actually our technology specialists. You could tell by their faces that they fluffed up a little bit. They built some confidence and realized “Wow, I can do this. I can bring information to the table that is actually going to be used.”

AND MATH

Teacher 1: And Math. I think if I gave them the charts and the letters and said “OK, here are some questions about it,” I'd hear “Oh my god.” But they were discovering this on their own. Through their research, they were coming up with bar graphs and they were trying to interpret them. But if they were going to use it, they had to understand it and to be able to communicate what that graph said. They were doing a lot of the calculations on the board when they were talking about the amount barrels of oil and the dollars it would take to go around instead of through the Suez Canal – that all came from that. That was natural.

NEWLY MOTIVATED

Teacher 2: There's one student I'm thinking of– this student is very low motivated – I mean you have to get on top of him to get him to do anything. Well, the minute he got on the computer to work on a PowerPoint, he did not want to get off until he was done each job. He was there over the bell. I mean he was doing the PowerPoint – he was getting information from his teammates. He was putting it all in. He felt so excited about his part in what he was doing. But because he saw how successful he was in that class, he was able to let his abilities and his strengths shine.





CONFIDENCE DEVELOPED

Teacher 3: And the kids then had a different approach to him. They started to have this whole new level of respect and appreciation for him. Their opinion changed of him. I mean one of the biggest, most popular kids in our team who can be a dynamic leader – is now running to this kid saying “Hey can you just help me? How do I do this – how do I do that?” They all found their little niche and they found what they were good at – and their peers helped them realize what they were good at – I mean there was a lot of peer tutoring....