INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Topic Focus
My inquiry project topic is Project-Based Learning (PBL) in secondary education, specifically in the social studies classroom. This topic appealed to me because during my student teaching of 7th grade history my mentor teacher encouraged me to use Project-Based Learning (PBL) as a primary type of learning activity and summative assessment. This fits very well with my teaching philosophy of learning while doing (thank you, Dr. John Dewey).

Critical thinking skills can be built as students work through the project creation process on their own, or with classmates in a group. This can be done with nominal direct teaching instruction (DeMink-Carthew & Olofson, 2020). In the era of Common Core standards, critical thinking skills are of the utmost importance.

Allowing students to pursue their own interests, within the context of the unit being studied, is high on my list of priorities. I want to maximize the effectiveness of PBL in my future classroom.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Specifically I will center my inquiry around these research questions:
1) What elements create quality Project-Based Learning instruction in secondary education?
2) How is Project-Based Learning applied in the secondary social studies classroom?
3) What are the benefits of using Project-Based Learning in the social studies classroom?

WHAT MAKES QUALITY PROJECT-BASED LEARNING?
- Thoughtful instruction to prepare students
- Alignment to standards
- Building the classroom culture & managing activities
- Scaffolding student learning
- Rubric-based assessment

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING ALIGNMENT WITH TPEP

- Alignment with TPEP Standard #1: Centering instruction on high expectations for student achievement – *The teacher communicates high expectations for student learning*

- With PBL, the teacher must take on a new primary role of facilitator and communicator – assisting and coaching students to be creators and team members (Cervantes et al., 2015)

THEORY & PRACTICE
“Give the pupils something to do, not something to learn; and the doing is of such a nature as to demand thinking; learning naturally results . . .”
- Dr. John Dewey

APPLICATION IN THE CLASSROOM
- Teachers know their students best and should guide the PBL process, including scaffolding for student success
- It is important to build student skills ahead of launching into the project process (Johnson & Cuevas, 2016)

TECHNOLOGY AND PBL
- Evidence shows that student attitudes towards learning social studies improves when doing multi-media PBL projects (Hernández-Ramos & De La Paz, 2009)

CLASSROOM EXAMPLE
During my student teaching at Lincoln Middle School, my mentor teacher and I asked our 7th grade social studies students to create a project on the medieval Middle East. Below is an example of what a student partnership created – they scored high on all aspects of the rubric.

POSSIBLE CHALLENGES WITH PBL
Potential Challenges with PBL:
- Situations where students struggle to work together in a partnership or group
- Need to reimagine the role of the teacher-student relationship – allowing for the teacher to be more supportive not prescriptive

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