5 Advantages and Disadvantages of Problem-Based Learning (PBL)

+ Activity Design Steps

Advantages

1. **Development of Long-Term Knowledge Retention**

   Students who participate in PBL activities can improve their abilities to retain and recall information. This is because, while learning about something, open discussion between peers reinforces understanding of subject matter.

2. **Use of Diverse Instruction Types**

   Grouping students together for PBL allows them to tackle tangible problems and enjoy team-based learning. You can also provide content such as videos, news articles and more.

3. **Continuous Engagement**

   It's not hard to see the potential for engagement, as students collaborate to solve real-world problems that directly affect or heavily interest them.

4. **Development of Transferable Skills**

   Using PBL to present tangible contexts and consequences can allow learning to become more profound and durable, helping students apply skills they develop to other real-world scenarios.

5. **Improvement of Teamwork and Interpersonal Skills**

   Completing a PBL challenge hinges on interaction and communication, meaning students should also build skills related to teamwork and collaboration.

Disadvantages

1. **Potentially Poorer Performance on Tests**

   Because standardized tests typically reward fact-based learning with multiple choice and short answer questions, PBL activities may not effectively prepare students.

2. **Student Unpreparedness**
Many students may not be prepared to participate in a PBL exercise due to immaturity, unfamiliarity with broad questions and lack of prerequisite knowledge.

3. Teacher Unpreparedness

You may have to adjust some habits, such as overtly correcting students and teaching to promote the fast recall of facts. Instead, give hints and ask questions to encourage independent thought.

4. Time-Consuming Assessment

If you choose to give marks, assessing a student’s performance throughout a problem-based learning exercise demands constant monitoring and note-taking.

5. Varying Degrees of Relevancy and Applicability

It can be easy for students to divert from the challenge’s objectives, possibly missing pertinent information. Running into unanticipated obstacles when solving the problem is another possibility.

Steps to Designing PBL Activities

1. Identify an Applicable Real-Life Problem: Find a tangible problem that’s relevant to your students, allowing them to easily contextualize it and apply it to future challenges.

2. Determine the Activity’s Purpose: Identify which skills you want to help students build by running the activity, helping you complete the subsequent activity design steps.

3. Create and Distribute Helpful Material: Provide handouts and other content, such as datasets and news articles, to help students stay focused on the activity’s purpose.

4. Set Goals and Expectations for Your Students: Give students a guide or rubric that defines goals and expectations, keeping them on track.

5. Participate: Fill knowledge gaps and ask questions to dig into students’ thought processes, helping them think through tough spots.

6. Have Students Present Ideas and Findings: Asking students to present their thoughts and results to the class adds a large-group learning component to the lesson.

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