

More than Education

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What does it mean to increase educational access? It means giving everyone the same resources and opportunities. But do people need equality? No, people need equity. Equity allows the underserved to have a chance to be served with the proper tools necessary for them to thrive. An education that will allow them to find success and provide them with opportunities they would not be able to attain otherwise. Opportunities will strengthen their ideas of what they want to do in the future and help them learn new abilities to transfer to other aspects. That is what an equitable education should provide.

Supplying opportunities such as pursuing projects in certain fields or allowing students to understand different studies. It can also include having children be able to be creative and have access to broaden their knowledge of the world around them. This is Project-Based learning (PBL): an increasingly more used teaching method being implemented in many schools.

Problem based learning develops the child's ability to work with his or her peers, building teamwork and group skills. Educational researcher Sylvia Chard states, "One of the major advantages of project work is that it makes school more like real life. It's an in-depth investigation of a real-world topic worthy of children's attention and effort." (n.d, 2007) By bringing in real world concepts to the curriculum, PBL encourages students to be independent workers, critical thinkers, and lifelong learners. PBL is learning by doing, having students "investigate and respond to an authentic, engaging, and complex problem or challenge", as the Buck Institute for Education (BIE) explains. PBL has long and short term impacts for students. Along with being shown in *A Review of Project Based Learning*, "With increased attendance,

growth in self-reliance, and improved attitudes toward learning.” (Thomas, 2000) Along with academic gains equal to or better than those generated by other models, students involved in projects take greater responsibility for their own learning than during more traditional classroom activities (Boaler, 1997; SRI, 2000). PBL can be effective in helping increase the quality of education.

While PBL is a tool that can be used to better education, it does not create equitable access by itself. Currently, children need better access to education. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, U.S. school enrollment dropped by 2.9 million from 2019 to 2020, with enrollment among the under-35 population dipping to its lowest level (52.4% of the total population) in over 20 years. However, there is a way to distribute resources to underprivileged children. We can create a platform for students who would be able to teach themselves and teach others. Teachers provide the power of education to today’s youth, giving them the possibility for a better future (Madhu, 2019). Educators are very influential to a student’s career, and by having volunteers teach PBL to children it provides them a better education as well. People who would teach the children would include volunteers, such as college students, or other community members that can take courses on PBL. More than 30 million children are growing up in poverty. In one low-income community, there was only one book for every 300 children. (Engelhardt and Skinner, 2011) Taking this book and trying to teach it to all the 300 children isn’t plausible, but neither is providing each child with their own book. Instead, if we were able to take a book and distribute it so that there's one book for every 20 children, this would increase the use of this book. This is essentially what will be happening with the teachers. A teacher’s extensive knowledge makes teaching more effective. Having volunteers teach these courses will increase the number of teachers. Thus, the solution would create more educational access to children in

the United States and provide them with an education that will benefit them in the future. It's about more than their education, but providing students across the country with the tools they need to thrive. It's about giving them equity, and this idea is the way we can succeed in doing so.

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