

Making the Case for Authenticity

Callista Kukawski, Banner University Medical Center
8th Grade Science

Introduction:

In my teaching, I found that students wanted authentic and relevant content and context in school so that their learning was tied to real life. Students wanted to engage in science if they felt that it was relevant to the real world and would make a meaningful difference. I observed an increased demand for 21st century skills at Banner University Medical. For improvement of processes and practices, teams work to solve problems using 21st century skills. I wanted to provide students with learning experiences similar to those in professional and academic settings. Students are able to develop 21st Century skills through relevant and authentic learning. I worked to identify which learning experience would best give students access to learning experiences that showed growth as well as an opportunity to develop skills needed in industry and further professional learning experiences.

I wanted to investigate how I could increase students' depth of learning through teaching the real life content they were interested in. My investigation included 21 students who participated in eight lessons in which I employed various instructional strategies. I collected data on student learning, engagements and interest through pre and post surveys and standardized test scores.

Findings:

Students better understand concepts from exploratory based instruction if context is relevant and authentic. Students who identified learning best from exploratory instruction explained it was because they could make relevant and authentic connection to their own identities. Students' interest in learning increases when they are challenged. When describing lessons they learned the most from, 50% of students identified enjoyment and access to higher level content as key aspects of the lessons. Students became self-driven learners when provided with authentic and relevant learning experiences. When asked what experiences students would find meaningful and would like access to in the future, 50% of students requested specific authentic and relevant academic opportunities, 50% of these students also connected this to their identities or future STEM pathways.

Action plan:

Relevant and authentic learning experiences support students in learning 21st century skills. I will develop authentic and relevant components for each unit throughout the year. In the future, I want to further support the development of 21st skills. I will develop a dual instructional strategy unit in which the class investigates a problem through an exploratory lesson while conducting small group student-driven investigations.