Combining Problem Based Learning and Activism in a Feminist Classroom

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This article explores my experience of incorporating a multi-stage Problem-Based Learning (PBL) project in an undergraduate women’s studies course. PBL is a pedagogical approach that uses real open-ended problems of the social world as a basis for students to collectively consider and address. Incorporating an activist element as a final stage serves to connects classroom learning to the world students inhabit, provide them with a chance to direct their own learning, and motivate them with tools to address inequality, thus inspiring their own activism. PBL shares important characteristics with feminist pedagogy and I argue that this pedagogical approach allows instructors to integrate the benefits of community engagement and feminist pedagogy to increase student learning and commitment to action. I adopt a reflexive approach to examine student responses and my own from this project. I note four themes from students that include attention to the collaborative process and collective ownership, being empowered to act, focusing on solutions for the community, and a greater knowledge of the problem and connection to the women’s studies discipline. Finally, I offer a few considerations for instructors interested in incorporating problem based learning with an activist component in a future course.

KEYWORDS: Problem-Based Learning, Social Activism, Feminist Pedagogy.

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