Twenty-first century based learning is often characterized by those graced with strong technology skills and knowledge. However, many would also argue that a quality 21st century education goes beyond facility with contemporary technologies, and includes inventive thinking and effective communication (NCREL 2003), critical thinking (Halpern, 2003), student self-directedness (Midgley, 2002; Schunk and Zimmerman), global awareness and economic literacy (Partnership for 21st Century Learning Skills), and cooperative learning (NCREL 2003; Partnership for 21st Century Learning Skills). Efficacy on student achievement by those in rich project-based learning environments has been previously demonstrated (Mergendoller, Maxwell & Bellisimo, 2003).

Therefore, 21st century learners placed in rich technology environments and allowed to develop the academic and social skills described above are situated in ideal environments combining technology with rich learning. Through the support of a FIPSE grant and a unique set of partners, including the George Lucas Educational Foundation, the Buck Institution for Education (BIE) has developed the www.PBL-Online.org website. This online resource for project-based learning includes: 1) an introduction to and an explanation of Project Based Learning written in accessible language for educators unfamiliar with Project Based Learning; 2) An interactive, self-instructional course based on the widely used BIE PBL Handbook; 3) A downloadable, 3 credit course in Project Based Learning ready to be loaded on a Blackboard server and offered at any university (BIE permission required) and 4) the PBL Collaboratory. The Collaboratory is a unique, virtual environment that allows learners and educators to work collaboratively in the creation of project-based learning materials. The collaborative efforts of those developing their projects are supported by the availability of George Lucas Educational Foundation (GLEF) multimedia materials, presented in a carefully orchestrated and scaffolded design.

This panel will introduce the audience to the PBL-Online website, and discuss how it has been used successfully in graduate education and professional development. This 20-30 minute presentation will set the stage for interactive discussion between the presenters and the audience as they explore how PBL-Online, and especially the PBL Collaboratory, can be used as a powerful learning environment for other educators and students.

References


Buck Institute for Education. *PBL Handbook*. Author: 2003

