



Composing Our World: Supporting Literacy and Social and Emotional Learning Through Project-Based Learning

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The Common Core State Standards set a high bar for literacy learning for all students. Yet standards alone are unlikely to be sufficient to support learning and develop the social and emotional awareness and skills students need to succeed as readers, writers, and composers of media in today's world. Moreover, amid the turmoil of reform, many classrooms have lost the aspects of learning that stir up students' passion, enthusiasm, and drive, especially in schools serving students from marginalized communities. Recognizing a need to engage students in deep learning, reflection, empathy, and fun, we will develop and study a project-based learning (PBL) ecosystem to support ninth-grade English language arts (ELA). This ecosystem will include a full-year curriculum that is highly adaptable to student interests and community concerns and that provides supports for teacher adaptation. Specifically, this work will revitalize ELA in ninth grade by engaging in the following actions:

- Creating an overarching project focused on the unifying theme of composing our world, the idea that reading, writing, and multimodal composing are central to making our world and our way in it
- Fully integrating literacy and social and emotional learning goals -- centered on collaborative activities and shared habits of composing, iterating, and revising text together -- with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) support
- Creating embedded supports for teachers and a model Design Institute for extending the professional-learning community of teachers engaged with PBL in ELA

The "Composing Our World" team will empirically study the impact of the initiative on teachers' instruction as well as on students' academic and social and emotional learning and engagement, and will gather evidence of feasibility and usability needed for scale-up. The project will use an approach that allows us to quickly design, study, and refine the materials and processes in both the teacher and student experiences in years one and two of the project and then to study impacts on students and teachers using a treatment-comparison-group design in year three.

Working collaboratively with teachers, the team will construct an immersive experience for ninth-grade English classes. The experience will build around an overall theme of self in community with a set of thematic questions that begins with, "How am I a hero?" Such questions provoke curiosity and allow student-guided inquiry to drive the key projects. Students will be guided on journeys emphasizing critical reflection on self and community;

heroes must first understand themselves and seek empathy with the world around them to successfully resolve their epic journey. Undertaking personalized journeys, students will explore their communities' histories and their own identities, and in the process, they will embark on community-based projects. Throughout, students will read a variety of texts and design with multimodal reflection and production, with the guidance of teachers and community members, using digital tools and UDL scaffolds. Students will compose a world of exploration, inquiry, and empathic opportunity while meeting high standards for academic learning.

The project-based ecosystem will presume that teachers and students are capable codesigners of curriculum, in the ways they infuse projects with their own energy, come up with ideas for how to engage students, and make adaptations -- what we term "epic engagement." This project will therefore take an intentionally collaborative approach to research and development, involving teachers and students throughout the process, because successful adaptation of curriculum requires them to take ownership of the project. Instead of a traditional training or professional development, this project will launch development through a Design Institute.

Key products will be a project-based ecosystem for ninth-grade ELA aligned to Common Core State Standards, integrated experiences for social and emotional learning related to collaborative acts of composing and revision, integrated supports for all students to learn through UDL, a design for a replicable Design Institute to prepare teachers to enact and develop their own PBL curriculum materials, and evidence of the feasibility of implementation and promise for improving teacher practice, student engagement, and learning.