

16.

Teaching and Learning Using Genius Hour and Project Based Learning

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Learning challenge/opportunity: The concepts of Genius Hour and Project-Based Learning (PBL) are introduced in a course that focuses on integrating creativity into the classroom. Students in this course explore creative learning theories and research, and focus on designing instructional strategies that encourage elementary-level students to think critically and be aligned with student interest. Genius Hour and PBL allow students to design individual projects based on their own questions and interests. Because the instructor is encouraging students to integrate Genius Hour and PBL into their future classrooms, an assignment was created where the students design and carry out their own Genius Hour project throughout the course of the semester. Description of practice/how it was implemented: During the first few weeks of the semester, students immerse themselves in learning about Genius Hour through articles, webinars, and class discussions. Students then brainstorm their interests, passions, and questions that may lend themselves to a semester-long project. After spending some time considering their brainstorming, a topic is selected. Students then pitch their Genius Hour project to the instructor and peers in class. The pitch contains several sections: what, why, how, measure of success, and dissemination. The 'what' is an outline of learning goals and possible challenges. The 'why' discusses the heart of the student interest...why is the student choosing this topic/question to work on? The 'how' includes information such as possible resources, along with a timeline for completing the project. The 'measure of success' discusses how students will know their project has been successful. Finally, 'dissemination' considers where the students will go next with this project in terms of further learning and sharing of information. Students then devote a minimum of 1 hour a week, outside of class, to work on the project. Every few weeks, a brief update/check-in session was built into the class schedule. During these check-ins, students share pulse checks of their projects and collaborate with peers for assistance or suggestions. At the end of the semester, students create a presentation to share their project. The final presentation format varies from student to student, as it must be aligned with their unique project. Impact on student learning and engagement: A minimum of 10 hours per semester of outside class time focused on Genius Hour is required. However, very few students complete just the minimum. Typically, students at least double the required time. Students report being energized by working on a project of their own selection. Class pulse checks are true collaborative efforts, with students working together to guide each other and support each other through their learning. Recent graduates of the Education Department plan to implement Genius Hour into their elementary classrooms.

Learning Outcome(s): Participants will gain an understanding of Genius Hour and Project-Based Learning, and will begin to consider how these types of student projects could be implemented into their courses.