

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY SAN MARCOS

PROJECT SIGNATURE PAGE

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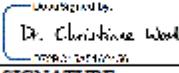
AUTHOR(S): Krista Horrigan

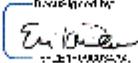
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Dr. Christiane Wood		5/6/2018
COMMITTEE CHAIR	SIGNATURE	DATE

Dr. Erika Daniels		5/7/2018
COMMITTEE MEMBER	SIGNATURE	DATE

COMMITTEE MEMBER	SIGNATURE	DATE
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COMMITTEE MEMBER	SIGNATURE	DATE
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Implementing Genius Hour to Increase Student Motivation

Krista M. Horrigan

California State University San Marcos

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Abstract

Teachers can use Genius Hour in their classes as an innovative way to get kids excited and passionate about school. Students will be more successful when the teacher takes an innovative approach to teaching, learning and designing new experiences (Wettrick, 2014). This Genius Hour Unit is designed for teachers to use as a means of motivating and inspiring students to help them feel more engaged. Using many Genius Hour instructional guides developed from experts in the field, this project employs research-based pedagogies that will increase student motivation and inspire students to pursue their passions.

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Chapter One: Definition of the Problem

Given the extensive literature describing the significance and benefits of intrinsic motivation, it appears that student engagement and related constructs, such as intrinsic motivation to learn or interest in learning, decline sharply as students advance through school (Connor, 2002). To promote high school completion with sufficient academic and social skills, engagement is the primary model used to understand student dropout and success. (Appleton, 2008). Since 1984, studies (Goodlad) have characterized high school students as bored, staring out classroom windows, counting the seconds for the bell to ring, and pervasively disengaged from the learning process. According to the 2014 Gallup Student Poll, 47% of 825,000 public school students surveyed across the country were disengaged during school. In 2016 the number of students who felt disengaged during school increased to 51%. The most recent poll in 2017 revealed 53% of 733,471 students surveyed feel disengaged or not engaged in school at all. With the increasing number of high school students feeling detached from school, it is important for teachers to implement pedagogies that will help increase student motivation and engagement.

Teachers have long researched ways to improve their pedagogies. Marshall (1993) researched school effectiveness in the 1970s and found consistencies across their studies related to a strong principal, high expectations, a safe and humane climate, a focus on basic skills, and the instructional use of test data. She also elaborated that previous studies were depressing in that they seemed to say schools were not making an impact on students in the way they were intending. Most education reform is driven by a belief that the system is badly broken and must be fixed. Houston (2007) shares a common belief among researchers that school systems are successful in preparing children for agricultural and industrial economies and need to evolve to meet current demands.

According to the National Research Council (2003) as a result of high school students exerting little effort, claiming to be bored, not completing tasks and being inattentive, students are chronically disengaged. High achieving students tend to also go through the motions of school, and many are doing what they need to garner high grades without becoming deeply engaged and without actually learning the intended material (Conner, 2004). Analyses run by Connell and Wellborn (2000) and other scholars who draw on the tradition of self-determination theory demonstrate that students who do not feel a sense of autonomy, a sense of belonging, or a sense of competence are more likely to be disaffected than engaged (Reeve, 2002). Concerning instructional relevance, students are more likely to become engaged with authentic academic work that intellectually involves them in the process of meaningful inquiry to solve real-life problems that extend beyond the classroom (Newmann, 1992).

High school is a time for discovery where students can explore their interests and passions, find their own voice, and grow emotionally and socially. According to Marshall (1993), Disadvantaged student failure rates can be predicted as early as first grade due to traditionally structured schools tending to favor those who are ready to learn and push out those who are not (Marshall, 1993). Some research suggests that teacher burnout is to blame for students' negative feelings towards school resulting in low motivation. Murdoch's (2000) study found the following:

The multilevel analyses demonstrated that teachers' burnout was negatively associated with students' autonomous motivation. It is supported that teachers' burnout is an important environmental factor explaining changes in students' motivation.

Public schools were once shaped to fit industrial models of efficient production and less designed to support the new, cutting-edge technology of the time (Marshak, 2003). According to Juliani, (2014), public schools were not only created in the interests of industrialism -- they were created in the image of industrialism. In many ways, they reflect the factory culture they were designed to support. School systems tend to base education on the principles of an assembly line and efficient division of labor.

A student will feel a greater sense of control when a teacher can provide them with opportunities to make choices (autonomy) which will result in greater educational outcomes (Urdu, 2006). Juliani (2014) describes reasons teachers may feel hesitant to give students more sense of control due to the pressures of current curriculum, common core standards, administrative pressures, and parent questions which make autonomy supportive pedagogies difficult to implement. Teachers struggle with finding the balance between preparing students academically while also addressing their social and emotional needs. Many teachers' efforts to use innovative, research-based methods to engage students are thwarted by the conflict that they experience between their desires to be innovative and the pressure to maintain high test scores (Agee, 2004). In traditional education, teachers tend to use extrinsic motivators -- rewards and punishments-- in the form of grades and as a solution to solving problems which in turn do not encourage the innovative thinking required to create novel solutions for unsolved problems (Brookhouser, 2015). Human development and capability approach to curriculum narrow the divide between existing normative structures in education and the disparate needs of students in order to enhance student learning (Walker and Unterhalter, 2007).

Students will be more successful when the teacher takes an innovative approach to teaching, learning and designing new experiences (Wettrick, 2014). Education leaders must take

more risks and break away from the historically conservative institution and embrace change for schools (Brookhouser, 2015). Genius Hour is an approach to education that allows a student to spend 80% of their class time working on regularly assigned projects related to content curriculum, and the remaining 20% of their time pursuing one of their passions with a purpose. Although there is limited research on Genius Hour related to high school students, large companies have allowed their employees to complete Genius Hour projects and as a result, have created some products that otherwise may have never been discovered. Motivation research finds that when students have choices and can have some control over their learning, they will be more inspired and excited about school.

Purpose of Project

Many educators are successfully implementing Genius Hour as an approach to empower students with autonomy while preparing students for a future career that may not exist in today's world. The purpose of this project is to support and encourage educators to be innovative through a Genius Hour as a means to increase student motivation. This project serves as a resource for teachers looking to modify their curriculum to be more responsive to current times. The unit plan supports teachers and provides them with the tools to confidently lead this project in their classrooms. The more opportunities students have to explore their passions and to use those passions with a purpose the more they will be prepared for a career that may not exist yet.

Preview of Literature

The impetus for human behavior which causes individuals to initiate and sustain goal-direction actions is motivation (Jenkins & Demaray, 2015). The extensive research on student motivation has found that when students feel a greater sense of autonomy, they have better academic outcomes including engagement, achievement, persistence, and learning (Appleton,

2008). This project was grounded in the existing literature to support teachers in implementing Genius Hour into their curriculum.

The following review of literature explores research studies which have overwhelmingly stated intrinsic motivation will be more inspirational to students than temporary extrinsic rewards. Secondly, the research shows that there is minimal opportunity for students to express creativity or pursue their passions. Students have very little control over what they learn and what classes they can take, yet research suggests student autonomy leads to student success. Lastly, the literature review discusses how motivation research shows student autonomy as being the main factor in producing higher quality, more inspired students with less disciplinary issues. The research reviewed supports implementing projects such as Genius Hour as a means to increase student motivation and success and provides the framework for this project's design.

Preview Methodology

I created a Genius Hour Unit Plan for secondary teachers in all content areas that include instructional guides, handouts, and rubrics that can be immediately used. A pacing guide suggests how long to spend on each of the activities in the unit. I created many of the activities and instructional guides and found resources from other Genius Hour experts in the field. All of the activities designed employ research-based pedagogies and is to be used as a guide for teachers who are attempting to implement Genius Hour for the first time.

Significance of Project

Learning connected to creativity, innovation, critical thinking, and local/global citizenship is increasingly marginalized and the possibility of personal and social transformation, founding principles of the American educational system, are compromised (Maguire 2012).

While teachers struggle to balance the curriculum, common core standards, administrative and parent pressures, Genius Hour has the potential to motivate students and prepare them academically, all the while also addressing their social and emotional needs. Teachers will still need to focus on maintaining high test scores; however, implementing Genius Hour will increase student motivation, inspire them to pursue their passions.

When Juliani (2015) addressed the power of a passionate student, he claimed passion is what drives people to be excited about a project and keep going even when everything seems to get in the way. Students can be excited about a project, but when they are passionate, they can accomplish so much more. This Genius Hour Unit Plan will provide teachers with the resources to support and guide them through the project with confidence.

Summary of Chapter

This chapter described the purpose of the project, which was to support teachers through the creation of a Genius Hour Unit Plan to be used as a means to increase student motivation. The current literature is reviewed to discuss the significance of implementing pedagogies that intrinsically motivate students. This chapter also previews the methodologies used to develop the unit plan. In the next chapter, current research and literature on ways Genius Hour will effectively increase student motivation will be discussed.

Definitions

“Genius Hour” is an approach that allows students to explore their own passions and encourages creativity in the classroom. It provides students a choice in what they learn during a set period of time during school.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The significance of intrinsic motivation

The current research looks at intrinsic motivation as a necessity in classrooms across the nation. Extrinsic rewards temporarily inspire students to complete a task as best as they can, yet it is the most common form of motivation in traditional schools (Covington, 2001). Skinner (2008) suggested providing students with more autonomy (choices) in their education is a crucial approach to supporting students' passions as well as providing them with more emotional support.

In actuality, research has shown extrinsic motivators to have the opposite effect towards inspiring students. According to Juliani (2014), research has repeatedly shown extrinsic motivation does not improve student performance; schools are still measuring success through grades. He explains what research has shown to be effective is supporting intrinsic motivation; students are rewarded through the act of gaining knowledge and demonstrating that knowledge. Newmann (1992), for example, argued that engagement is generated by authentic tasks that intellectually involve the student with questions or problems that have relevance beyond the world of the classroom and that interest the student personally. By asking students to perform original research on a topic of interest and significance to them, the extended essay presumably allows students to have an authentic, autonomy-supportive experience.

Ryan and Deci (2000) found intrinsically motivated behavior is a significant feature of human nature and plays an important role in development, high-quality performance, and well-being. Students' potential for success is inadvertently undermined when teachers use extrinsic motivators. (Alderman, 2013). Ryan and La Guardia (1999) raise concerns with the knowledge that greater intrinsic motivation relatedness to better performance, more positive attitudes, and greater creativity has not lead to increased student success. In 2002, Fredricks and Eccles found

that various studies demonstrate, without constructs of intrinsic motivation or support of students' interests in learning, student engagement declines sharply as students advance through school.

How Genius Hour supports autonomy and success

Renninger (2000) suggests that to understand individuals' motivation to learn about and engage in a particular activity on their own initiative (i.e., presumably intrinsically motivated behavior), one must focus on individual interest. Skinner (2016) asserted children who started the school year high in autonomy were likely to show improvements in their effort and enjoyment as the year progressed, whereas children low in autonomy (who felt externally or internally pressured) were likely to show increasing disaffection, both withdrawing their behavioral participation and feeling increasingly more bored and frustrated. If a student is given many opportunities to make choices, the student will likely feel a greater sense of control over educational outcomes. Therefore, teachers who provide students with the opportunities to make choices may enhance their students' sense of control (Anderman, 2008).

Part of the reason why the use of rewards, evaluation grades, gold stars, and contingent privileges is because teachers feel pressured and controlled by performance contingencies as well. Despite the widely held belief in the efficacy of rewards, reward interventions are likely to yield very disappointing results (Ryan & La Guardia, 1999). The prominence of standardized assessment encourages teachers to promote student conformity (Kim, 2008). Educators may feel a shift in control leaves them out of control, but it gives them more of an opportunity to support and foster student growth. According to Daniel Pink (2011) control leads to compliance, autonomy leads to engagement. In shifting the control of the learning from teacher centered to student-driven, students will have the opportunity to learn about what interests them. By

enabling students to be guided by their own questions, as well as the curriculum framework, students bring their knowledge, interests, and idiosyncrasies into their reading activities. As a consequence, their willingness to spend time and effort grows and their products display the benefits of dedicated reading (Guthrie, 2011).

The extensive existing research on student motivation overwhelming states that students with a greater sense of autonomy in school settings have better academic outcomes such as classroom engagement, persistence, achievement, and learning (Skinner 2008). According to Csikszentmihalyi (1997), there is a deep state of flow when skills are neither overmatched nor underutilized in a given challenge. The result of an appropriate level of challenge for students is an ideal learning situation in that it builds student skill levels and is one of the best ways to engage students. Autonomy-supportive learning environments enable a student to act in accordance with his or her personal goals, values, and interests (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

Teachers are perceived as relationally supportive when they create opportunities for students to be personally involved with their assignments; students will feel a sense of ownership and belonging through their involvement in the assignment (Reeve, 2002; Skinner et al., 2002). Students will feel not only greater perceived autonomy with autonomy supportive teachers, but also more positive functioning regarding classroom engagement, emotionality, creativity, intrinsic motivation, psychological well-being, conceptual understanding, academic achievement, and persistence in school (Reeve, 2006). Shernoff (2014) explains teachers may be able to enhance student engagement by supporting students' sense of competence and autonomy by providing tasks that offer choice and are connected to students' personal goals which offer opportunities for success. A useful distinction to make is that whole group instruction tends to be

perceived by students as relatively teacher-controlled, whereas small group and individual instruction are perceived as relatively student-controlled.

Genius Hour as a higher-learning motivation project

According to Hafen, (2012) autonomy supportive pedagogies that foster leadership, freedom of choice and relevancy of the material, properties all found in Genius Hour, are the key fundamental qualities that will lead to engagement, development, and growth in teens.

Aljughaiman and Mowrer-Reynolds' (2005) suggest teachers tend to be unprepared to design and teach creative curriculum strategies due to lack of training in the pre-service phase. They also suggest high stakes testing burdens teachers and makes it more difficult for them to identify and cultivate creative behaviors in students. Mullet (2016) stated the pedagogy of creativity is limited when schools assign priority to traditional teaching approaches, and it is important to develop an accurate understanding of teacher perceptions of creativity to be able to effectively implement creative pedagogies in the classroom.

According to Karwowski's (2013) study, even when teachers value creative strategies a wide variation in their conceptualizations adds to their inability to recognize creativity in students. Research has produced few practical approaches for fostering creativity or for incorporating theory into educational practice (Makel, 2009). Some educators view creativity as a distraction to be deferred or even view it as a behavior problem (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2010). Cohen (1989) suggested a heavily product-oriented focus neglects the developmental aspect of creativity and may prevent teachers from seeing opportunities to develop students' everyday insights into more comprehensive creative products (Cohen, 1989). In a 2010 survey, Beghetto found some teachers preferred less creative students in the classroom because they associate creativity with problem behaviors such as impulsivity and disruptive behavior. Similarly,

teachers incorrectly associated socially desirable personality characteristics with creativity (Runco, Johnson, & Bear, 1993).

In 1995, Westby and Dawson found that when asked about least favorite personality characteristics in students' was, teachers responded negatively towards those associative with creative prototypes. Even teachers who valued creativity often had unclear conceptions of what creativity meant; students identified as creative by teachers scored high on a verbal creativity task, low on a figural creativity task, and did not display personality traits traditionally associated with creativity (Dawson et al., 1999). As research on student motivation multiplies, the value in offering more creative projects that foster intrinsic motivation is as important in education as literacy and should be repeated with the same status (Robinson, 2014).

Genius Hour units are model projects to help students feel excited about school. In urban schools, evaluations of creative projects that encourage emotional engagement tend to increase positive attitudes toward school, which is an aspect of emotional and behavioral engagement (Cook, et al., 1999). Tawfik (2018) suggested that individuals attain higher learning gains from problem-based learning (PBL) than from more didactic, lecture-based approaches to instruction. "However, Aarnio (2013) believed the very aspects of PBL that allowed for a productive educational experience make it challenging to implement in the classroom because the nontraditional role of the instructor and atypical project structure may cause challenging team interactions.

Instructors may be uncomfortable with their altered, less authoritative role in the educational experience and students may experience a "culture shock" as they transfer from a passive role to more self-directed learning (Henry, et al., 2012). Students may also struggle while attempting to think critically to solve these group-worthy problems. Glasson (1989) suggested

hands-on activities ‘promote peer interaction where students are free to argue, make mistakes, and challenge each other. The teacher's close control of the outcomes can limit the number of conflict situations that promote learning. The National Research Council (1996) confirmed that hands-on experiences are a medium for evoking the “minds-on” experiences recommended in the National Science Education Standards. Interacting with materials also leads to positive attitudes, whereas passive listening leads to boredom and more negative attitudes (Ajewole, 1991). Through the implementation of Genius Hour, teachers devote approximately 20% of class time to allow students to be creative and innovative in their learning. Innovation starts at the teacher level, and teachers must be innovative in their approach to teaching, learning, and designing new experiences (Wettrick, 2014). Creativity and innovation enhance life success, healthy psychological functioning, positive conflict resolution, and amplifies the construction of knowledge (Mullet, 2016). Brookhouser (2015) explains educators must commit to implementing Genius Hour and find the courage to use a pedagogy that is unfamiliar from traditional classrooms.

Summary of Chapter

When provided with autonomy and the opportunity to explore their own interests, students will see the value in their education and will be more successful. Students are more successful when they are motivated intrinsically, and teachers need to support students’ passions so they can feel motivated. Educators are always trying to improve their pedagogies; having a resource available that helps them develop a more creative curriculum so students can be inspired to pursue their passions is needed. Through the implementation of Genius Hour, students will have more autonomy in their education and educators will have an opportunity support students’ passions so they can be more successful.

Chapter Three: Methodology

When a student is given many opportunities to make choices (autonomy), they will likely feel a greater sense of control over educational outcomes (Alderman, 2016). Genius Hour is a tool educators can use to motivate students to be passionate about their own learning. Education leaders must take risks in order for an institution to move forward (Brookhouser, 2015). The purpose of this project is to support and encourage educators to be innovative through a Genius Hour as a means to increase student motivation. In this chapter, the instruments and procedures used to create the unit will be outlined, and the design of the project will be discussed.

Design

To develop the unit, I used several measures and instruments to understand how Genius Hour will help increase student motivation and success. The goal was to create a unit plan that a teacher could immediately implement in their classroom. Every portion of the unit is consistent with the integrity of a Genius Hour project, supported by student motivation research, and aligned with ELA Common Core standards.

Developing a Genius Hour unit is an effective way for teachers to supplement their content curriculum with a project that will inspire students to pursue their own passions. The resource will be most helpful to teachers who are looking to motivate their students and not lose valuable teaching time. The effective implementation of a Genius Hour unit will be evident in student work; they will devote countless hours to their projects because they have control over their topic and product. Students who feel passionate will want to put in the extra effort of each component of the unit. This resource serves as a guide for teachers to take the supportive role while students work towards learning the Common Core standards.

Intended Audience

This Genius Hour Unit is intended for use by high school teachers grades nine through twelve. The Unit can be shortened or expanded to suit the needs of the individual teacher in all high school content areas. Teachers who implement this unit may use all or some of the resources provided. They may also align their teaching practices with the alignment to the Common Core State Standards.

Resources

For this project, I developed a unit plan in the form of a hyperdoc using resource guidebooks developed by published educators, as well as a few original pieces. The unit is created to serve as a guide for teachers who are implementing Genius Hour in their classroom and would like some beginning resources. As a guide, teachers can use the sources as they see fit in their curriculum. Each resource provided in the unit plan is accompanied with research supporting the rationale for using each document.

Procedures

To develop each section of the unit plan, many resources were used to understand what educators, experts on Genius Hour, are already doing in the classroom. Using their format as a template, I used recent research to develop a guidebook for teachers who are implementing Genius Hour for the first time. Many guidebooks explain the rationale behind using Genius Hour in the classroom, but there were limited resources available to support immediate implementation of the projects with students.

According to motivation research, student autonomy will produce higher quality work, more inspired students, and less disciplinary issues. Genius Hour is one-way teachers can engage students in meaningful projects that motivate them. At the start of the Genius Hour unit development, I discovered how traditional thoughts on schools show classrooms with seats in

rows and assignments that align with 19th-century visions of education. In contemporary classroom contexts, teachers are moving away from the more traditional classrooms and are seating students so they can comfortably collaborate with each other. When students have a shared experience with their peers, they can connect and collaborate with each other to come up with even bigger ideas. If a student is doing Genius Hour in more than one class, they will more likely be able to make connections to what their learning and the real world. Teenagers are notorious for asking why their learning something when they have no interest in the subject. The research has supported that students who have opportunities to express their creativity are more motivated and excited about school, especially when they have a choice in what they are studying. Genius hour is an effective tool for teachers to use to support students and keep them motivated. This unit is intended to help teachers feel more confident and prepared in implementing genius hour.

Summary of Chapter

This unit was created to serve secondary teachers; it was developed so that a teacher in any content area would feel comfortable devoting as little as 20% of their regular class time towards Genius Hour to allow students to pursue their passions. More educators need to be aware of what Genius Hour is and how it can be implemented in their class. Professional Development should be offered to give teaching professionals an opportunity to think about and plan how they can support students through Genius Hour. I hope this project will inspire more teachers to attempt Genius Hour in their classrooms. With the many demands that come with high school, it is important students get a chance to explore their passions. This project could inspire them to create a new product, solve a real life/world problem, or simply guide them towards a future college or career path.

Teachers need a resource that is going to be relatively simple in nature to implement. It is not very simple for teachers to purchase and read all of the guide books developed for Genius Hour. This unit plan is an accumulation of the many books that are currently available. Teachers can read and use this unit plan knowing that research supports each portion of the unit. Teachers will see students become more passionate and motivated about school and Genius Hour because they have ownership and control over at least 20% of their learning.

Chapter Four: Genius Hour Unit Plan

Week One - Bad Idea Factory	Notes to Teacher
Introduction Hyperdoc Bad Idea Factory Week One Research	<p>Students click on the Hyperdoc and watch videos about Genius Hour.</p> <p>Students brainstorm “bad ideas” as a way to inspire good ideas.</p> <p>*Optional- Teacher may choose to select a topic for Genius Hour (Community Service, Social Justice, Environment)</p>
Week Two - Planning Sheet	Notes to Teacher
Genius Hour Planning Sheet (for students)* The Genius Project (for teachers) Week Two Research	<p>The teacher has the options to choose a focus topic for Genius Hour and if students are allowed to work in pairs/groups.</p> <p>*Optional completion grade</p>
Week Three - Elevator Pitch	Notes to Teacher
Elevator Pitch Planning Sheet Week Three Research	<p>Share a Shark Tank pitch video with students so they can understand what a pitch might look like.</p> <p>Students should have a driving question or problem that needs innovation, along with a mission statement and reason for pursuing the project.</p>
Week Four - Blog	Notes to Teacher
Student Blog/Vlog Instructions Week Four Research	<p>Students Blog or Vlog weekly about their results. They write reflections an informational pieces on what they’ve learned. They will share and collaborate with fellow students. They will also reflect on the work of their classmates.</p> <p>*optional completion grade to help maintain focus</p>

Week Five - Expert Interview	Notes to Teacher
Expert Interview Week Five Research	<p>Students may need a lot of help tracking down an expert in the field. Have conversations with them about what makes a person an expert versus someone who works "in the field." i.e., Veterinarian versus a Vet receptionist. You may also want to have students with similar projects collaborate to participate in each other's interviews.</p>

Week Six - Research Template	Notes to Teacher
Research Template Week Six Research	<p>Students will spend a majority of their time researching their topic. More in-depth lessons on source credibility, MLA or APA format, and research strategies should be discussed. *Optional completion grade Students must always be thinking of their audience. The audience should expand outside of the classroom.</p>

Week Seven - Common Core Reflection	Notes to Teacher
Common Core Reflection Week Seven Research	<p>When the students understand the skill they are supposed to master, they are more likely to achieve success. Asking students to reflect on what they have done and what they will do will help guide their success. *Optional completion grade</p>

Week Eight - Ted Talk Template	Notes to Teacher
Official Ted Talk Structure Template Week Eight Research	<p>Showing students exemplary Ted Talks, especially from Ted Youth will help students build confidence and garner insight into their own speech. Here is another speech by Nancy Duarte that explains how to deliver a Ted Talk.</p>

Week Nine - Peer Feedback	Notes to Teacher
Peer Accountability Web Week Nine Research	<p>Students should be commenting and giving feedback on at least three blog posts every week.</p>

Week Ten - Product	Notes to Teacher
The Final Product Week Ten Research	<p>The advice on the wall of Facebook’s headquarters read: Done Is Better Than Perfect. If students feel their final product is a failure, ask them what they learned about it.</p>

Week Eleven - Rehearse Speech	Notes to Teacher
Official Ted Talk Speech Rubric See Reflections and Rubrics Research	<p>Students will rehearse their speeches with a partner. The students will use the Ted Talk Rubric as a tool to evaluate what the student needs to work on before the final presentation.</p>

Week Twelve - Ted Talk Presentation (memorized)	Notes to Teacher
4-point Ted Talk Rubric See Reflections and Rubrics Research	<p>Official Ted Talk presentations are 18 minutes. The teacher has the option of deciding how long they would like the presentation to be. Teachers can use the 4-point rubric to assess the students’ speeches. One of the most important learning moments students will experience is sharing their passion and what they have learned.</p>

Reflection and Rubrics	Notes to Teacher
How Will This Be Graded? Reflection Form Grit Rubric Reflections and Rubrics Research	<p>Assess but don’t grade. Assess without stifling. Imagine being passionate about baking and when in you turn in your final, sweet product you receive a B because “the cookies were too hard.” Have students reflect on their experience through a written piece so they can better understand their experience.</p>

Genius Hour Unit Plan

Week One Research

Hyperdoc:

This hyperdoc is to be used as an introduction to the Genius Hour Project. Students will explore the PowerPoints, videos, and resources to begin their own projects. In the first box, students will watch an introduction to Genius Hour YouTube video created by educator, John Spencer. Next, they will read a handout created by TeachThought.com, a website developed by Terry Heick for teachers to inspire them to be more innovative in the classroom. The handout explains to students what an essential question is and is not. The next box in the hyperdoc is a Padlet I created for my own students. Teachers can continue to add to mine and create a network for sharing ideas, or they can make their own. Marshall (1993) claimed when students have a shared experience with their peers, they can connect and collaborate with each other to come up with even bigger ideas. In the last box on the top row, students are encouraged to use Google to search some key terms for Genius Hour. Providing time for them to explore can prove to be beneficial for the length of the project. Autonomy-supportive learning environments enable a student to act in accordance with his or her personal goals, values, and interests (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Teachers can also choose to select a topic or theme for the project. By asking students to perform original research on a topic of interest and significance to them, the extended essay presumably allows students to have an authentic, autonomy-supportive experience (Newmann 1992) The example I provide on the hyperdoc is a Social Justice topic and I include another Padlet for students to explore a social justice cause they would like to research.

The bottom row of the hyperdoc includes a PowerPoint developed by Dr. Christiane Wood explaining what Design Thinking is to students. Since students will not be graded on their final product, this presentation is provided to introduce to them the idea that they will have the

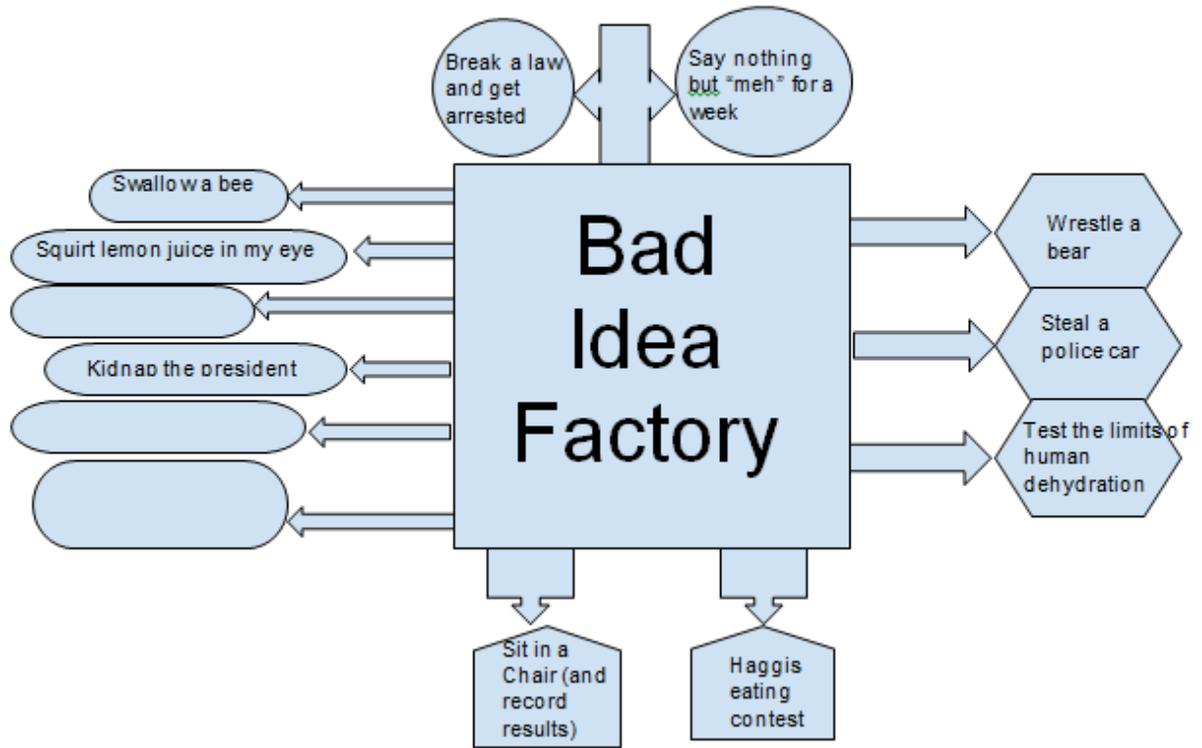
autonomy to choose what they make their project to be. Even high-achieving students may be going through the motions, “doing school” (Pope, 2001) or “doing the lesson” (JimenezAlexandre, Rodriguez, & Duschl, 2000); that is, doing what they need to do to garner high grades without becoming deeply engaged and without actually learning the intended material. I developed the remaining three boxes for information and reiteration purposes.

Bad Idea Factory:

The Bad Idea Factory was developed by educator Kevin Brookhouser, author of *The 20Time Project*. Through the process, they begin to think of something that they really do want to research. Nussbaum (2006) explained there is responsiveness and interactivity when students negotiate design decisions in a collaborative setting or in classroom dialogue that is characteristic of political processes in healthy democracies. Through this brainstorming activity, students collaborate to come up with wild and crazy ideas that they do not actually intend to study. Ultimately, through collaboration and dialogue with their peers, they will think of a topic of interest to them that they will research.

<p><u>What is Genius Hour?</u></p> 	<p><u>Essential Questions</u></p> 	<p><u>Like/Love Padlet</u></p> 	<p><u>Go to Google and search 20% project or Genius Hour. (10 minutes)</u></p>  <p><u>Social Justice Padlet</u></p>
<h1>Genius Hour</h1>			
<p><u>How will I be graded?</u> Presentation created by: Dr. Christiane Wood</p> 	<p>Your Task</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop an Essential Question: A need to know and something that serves others 2. Utilize your own voice and make choices 3. Use technology (powtoons, podcast, blog) 4. Research reliable sources online 5. Receive feedback and then revise 6. Publicly present a product 	<p>Expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Spend 20% of class time working on your genius ★ Spend at least 1 hour at home working on your genius 	<p><u>Accidental Inventions</u> <u>Ration Challenge</u> <u>Ocean Conservation</u></p> 

[Genius Hour Hyperdoc](#)



Genius Hour Unit Plan

Week Two Research

Genius Hour Planning Sheet:

The Genius Hour planning sheet is intended to help students become more organized in the initial steps of their project. Autonomy is an internal state, reflecting the integrated endorsement and organization of actions. The capacity to act autonomously is strongly impacted by social environments, which can vary from being controlling and coercive to supportive of autonomy self-regulation. Students will have a lot of options when choosing how to implement their Genius Hour project; however, it is important they still receive guidance and structure to support them. If they are not organized or feel confused with where to begin, their project will have a higher chance of being unsuccessful.

The Genius Project:

This document, created by A.J. Juliani (2014), serves to be a guide for teachers to organize their own administration and assessment of the unit. Assigning a grade for various aspects of the project can be detrimental to the students' final outcome. Grades are considered extrinsic motivators and many researchers claim grades can limit student success. According to Daniel Pink (2015), intrinsic motivation can move a person to change the world. Genius Hour should be a safe time to really learn. Ultimately, researchers agree that giving students choices and opportunities to take control of their learning will motivate and inspire them to accomplish things that are unimaginable to a teacher. It is not simply that some students are more motivated than others, but rather that the environment created in a class, which is setup largely by the teacher early in the year, can either allow only the most intrinsically motivated students to

flourish or allow all students the chance to express themselves and engage in the material regardless of their ability.

Genius Hour Plan Sheet

Genius Hour Topic Connection: Describe in detail the connection to the topic of your Genius Hour focus.

For my Genius Hour, I am requesting to work with:

I/We are going to:

- Learn about
- Learn to do
- Learn to make
- Learn to create
- Learn to test
- Learn to change
- Other?

For my Genius Hour Project I will:

This project is a good project because:

My final product will be:

An expert in my field of interest is:

My goal statement for this first week is the following: (steps you plan to take to begin, how and where you will research, who you will interview/call, what supplies you will gather)

My timeline to complete this project

What needs to be done	Where it will be done: (home, school)	Who will do it:	When we need to do it:	Completed
Plan Project				
Gather Materials				
Work on project				
Share and Evaluate Progress				
Complete Project				
Other				

The Genius Project: Autonomy, Mastery, and Purpose

Documenting the Process

(created by A.J. Juliani, courtesy of Ryan Perlman and Chris McDaniels)

Project Pitch (10%)

- Three-slide PowerPoint
 - Motivation
 - Timeline and resources
 - Goal
- Three minutes. Be prepared with an effective/refined script and delivery
- A three to five sentence typed explanation
- Q & A

BLOG (Minimally Six Entries): Due Day Six of Cycle

- Blogger.com
- Do not use last names on the blog
- Measurable Goals*: Must be part of your first blog
 - What are your goals?
 - How will you measure your progress/achievement?
- Document your time and your *readings*, which should encompass at least twenty-five percent of your time
 - Include citations from specific sources
 - Provide an explanation of how these have formed your project
- Discuss your *discoveries* and *setbacks*
 - What have you learned about your project?
 - What have you learned about yourself?
 - Where do you go from here?
- Other*: pictures/graphs/charts, videos, links, etc.
- Establish your voice . . .
- Comment on three other people's blogs. Be sure to indicate on your own blog where you left comments.

Video Blog (10%):

- An additional entry . . .
- Use Vimen. Embed in Blogger.
- Two minutes
- What/who has inspired you?
- How have your readings/resources informed your approach?
- Anything else?

Ted Talk (30%)

- Four to five minutes
 - Visual component*
 - PPT, Prezi, other
 - Creative and supplemental. *You* drive the presentation, not the visual
 - Content*
 - Inspire through your passion
 - Show your **product**
 - Explain your process
 - What is your purpose? What should your audience take away from your project?
 - Organization*: hook, transitions, logical order, effective conclusion
 - Delivery*: refined, poised, and enthusiastic
-
- **Dream big.** Strive to create the best talk you have ever given. Reveal something never seen before. Do something the audience will remember forever. Share an idea that could change the world.
 - **Show us the real you.** Share your passions, your dreams . . . And also your fears. Be vulnerable. Speak of failure as well as success.
 - **Make the complex plain.** Don't try to dazzle intellectually. Don't speak in abstractions. Explain! Give examples. Tell stories. Be specific.
 - **Connect with people's emotions.** Make us laugh! Make us cry!
 - **No selling from the stage!** Unless we have specifically asked you to, do not talk about your company or organization. And don't even think about pitching your products or services or asking for funding from the stage.
 - **Feel free to comment on other speakers' talks,** to praise or criticize. Controversy energizes! Enthusiastic endorsement is powerful!
 - **Don't read your talk.** Notes are fine. But if the choice is between reading or rambling, then read!
 - **End your talk on time.** Doing otherwise is to steal time from the people that follow you. We won't allow it.
 - **Rehearse your talk** in front of a trusted friend . . . for timing, for clarity, for impact.

Genius Hour Unit Plan
Week Three Research

Elevator Pitch Planning Sheet:

One of the most important aspects of planning a Genius Hour project is to consider who the audience is. "A 20Time project should NOT be student-centered. It should be *audience-centered*. A student-centered project is one that focuses on the creator's needs and desires. An audience-centered or user-centered project focuses on the actual person who will use, experience or be affected by the project. They will need to develop a driving, essential question as for their focus for the project. Enabling students to be guided by their own questions will increase their willingness to spend time and effort on their products (Guthrie 2011). While students consider what the final outcome of their project will be, they will need to pitch their ideas to their classmates. Receiving immediate feedback from their peers at the start of the project will help guide the remainder of their project. Teachers will need to set up a supportive atmosphere, so students feel inspired to talk about their projects with consideration of their audience. The pressure of presenting in front of one's peers before the project has become fully developed will inspire students to consider their audience more and focus less on the product they are trying to produce. However, if done poorly a student may feel discouraged from moving forward with their plans. The more students feel supported with their project endeavors, the more likely they will want to continue working. They can have the autonomy to choose their topics or what they will do with their projects, but the teacher's role should provide a safe environment for students to vulnerably share their projects. They can do this by providing structure and guidelines, one of which is to remind students that they should focus on who their audience is. This focus will guide their work as they should constantly be considering their audience for each aspect of the

project. Previous research has highlighted the importance of peers and the influence they can have on an individual's motivation and engagement in school.

Do This	Don't Do This	Examples
Your elevator pitch should be brief	Speak too fast	I recently graduated from college with a degree in communications.
You need to be persuasive	Ramble	I worked on the college newspaper as a reporter, and eventually, as the editor of the arts section.
Share your skills	Speak for less than 3 minutes	I'm looking for a job that will put my skills as a journalist to work.
Practice, practice, practice	Speak for more than 5 minutes	
Be flexible	Use too many (Google) slides	I compete in surf competitions and have been working with professional surfers in getting sponsored.
Mention your goals	Forget to practice and memorize	I have started making surfboards and would like to research ways to improve their performance and contribute to the industry.
Know your audience, and speak to them	Worry. The more prepared you are, the more you'll feel confident.	

Pitch Checklist	Pitch Outline
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The elevator pitch should be 3-5 minutes and include the following information: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> What do you already know about this project, concept, or idea? <input type="checkbox"/> What do you want to know about the project, concept, or idea? <input type="checkbox"/> How are you going to find out what you would like to know about this topic? <input type="checkbox"/> Why did you choose this project? <input type="checkbox"/> How can your peers support you as you work on your project? <input type="checkbox"/> What do you hope to create or produce to represent your project? <input type="checkbox"/> What technology will you need to deliver your pitch? 	<p>Project Title</p> <p>What do you know?</p> <p>What do you want to know?</p> <p>How are you going to find out?</p> <p>What will you use to create your pitch?</p> <p><i>Powtoon Vidra Google Slides iMovie Other</i></p>

Genius Hour Unit Plan
Week Four Research

Blog/Vlog:

For decades, students have been asked to write in journals as a way to organize their thoughts and reflect on their readings and experiences. When students practice publishing their thoughts online in an academic manner, they are rehearsing real-world skills that could lead to future opportunities. They are learning safe ways to communicate their ideas in an online forum and are using technology to prepare for a potential career.

Although teachers are not required to implement the blog/vlog portion in their Genius Hour unit, it also serves as a form of grading to track student progress. The teacher can ease students' fears about grades by structuring a point system that takes into account accomplishable tasks and reflections along the way. The actual completion of the big project is not the point (Wettrick, 2014). A teacher could provide completion credit for students who update their blogs and can offer immediate feedback by following and commenting each students' blog. Students could also follow each others' blogs and make weekly comments. This will keep the projects on a public platform and remind students to consider their audience throughout the entirety of the project.

BLOG (Minimally Six Entries): Due Day Six of Cycle

- Blogger.com
- Do not use last names on the blog
- Measurable Goals*: Must be part of your first blog
 - What are your goals?
 - How will you measure your progress/achievement?
- Document your time and your *readings*, which should encompass at least twenty-five percent of your time
 - Include citations from specific sources
 - Provide an explanation of how these have formed your project
- Discuss your *discoveries* and *setbacks*
 - What have you learned about your project?
 - What have you learned about yourself?
 - Where do you go from here?
- Other*: pictures/graphs/charts, videos, links, etc.
- Establish your voice . . .
- Comment on three other people's blogs. Be sure to indicate on your own blog where you left comments.

Video Blog (10%):

- An additional entry . . .
- Use Vimeo. Embed in Blogger.
- Two minutes
- What/who has inspired you?
- How have your readings/resources informed your approach?
- Anything else?

Genius Hour Unit Plan
Week Five Research

Expert Interview:

When a student feels passionate about a topic, they will likely become engaged with increased cognitive involvement as per Ryan and Deci's (2000) self-determination theory. Since Genius Hour allows students a new sense of freedom to take control of their learning, they explore will include a veritable cornucopia of topics. It is unlikely that their teacher has expertise in all of the topics, so it is important to provide students an opportunity to meet, either literally or virtually, an expert in the topic their passionate about. Teachers can enhance engagement and support students' sense of competence by offering tasks that provide choices connected to their personal learning goals (Shernoff, 2003). Getting to know an expert in their field of interest will provide learning opportunities that are beyond the classroom walls. There is no limit to what students are passionate about; their learning should not be confined to the walls of the classroom. Interviewing an expert in person, on the telephone, through Skype or other means of technology break down the walls of the classroom and open doors that students want to walk through. LaForce's (2017) study found policy-makers and practitioners seek to incorporate instructional approaches that can enhance these particular student attitudes. From our results, it appears that Genius Hour may be one such strategy for increasing students' interest in STEM fields. As students interview experts in the field of their interest, they will have a better understanding of what career path they may take and will have interview or networking advantages because they have already learned about the field first hand.

Expert Interview (Courtesy Andi McNair)

Students will reach out to experts around the world about their idea and learn from the best. Document the interview with video or other technology. Post the interview to the Blog or include excerpts in the final presentation.

1. **Look local.** Consider contacting your local colleges for experts. There are professors, athletes, and students that are more than willing to share their knowledge and information with young minds.
2. **Use social media.** Start with Twitter. While you might not always receive a response and don't always get to contact your first choice, it is a great way to find and contact experts quickly and easily.
3. **Just ask.** Experts love to share their knowledge and enjoy knowing that students are interested in learning from them. Don't be afraid to ask others to share and serve as experts for your student projects. A worse case scenario is that they say no and you keep looking.
4. **Look for opportunities.** Ask around and share your projects with anyone that will listen. Many of the experts have been suggested by other teachers, friends, or parents that know about the projects and are willing to help.
5. **Take chances.** Allow students to see your willingness to help them find experts and connect with them. Share your desire to make these connections with your administration and ask for their support. While they may not understand this type of learning right away, it will not take long for them to see the value and meaning of connecting your students with outside experts.

Genius Hour Unit Plan

Week Six Research

Research Template:

As a means to structuring the Genius Hour project, the teacher takes on a guiding and supporting role. Students will have a lot of freedom to make the choices for which direction they want their project to take, but the teacher will redirect the students when necessary and show them how to perform certain tasks as problems arise. For example, when students are spending 20% of the time in class working on their Genius Hour projects, they will likely be scouring and researching the internet for information about their topic. They will become experts on their topic, but they must receive guidance on what types of sources are reliable and credible. The teacher can show students different ways to organize their research and teach mini-lessons on how to incorporate their findings into their blog or vlog postings. A student will feel better in a supportive learning environment that allows the opportunity to express curiosity more than an unstimulated student in a threatening environment (Hafen, 2012).

Genius Hour Unit Plan

Week Seven Research

Common Core Reflection:

While students are delving into research, they will simultaneously and naturally be achieving the skills required for Common Core. When students are aware of what is expected of them, they are more likely to be successful in mastering those expectations. Some researchers believe educational strategies for developing creativity have failed to keep pace with advancements in the understanding of creativity (Plucker et al., 2004). Narrow standards of accountability for teachers and schools diminish the value of creative approaches to learning and problem solving (Sternberg, 2006). Genius Hour sparks a passion in students that inspires them to work harder than a teacher may expect them to. With teacher support and guidance, they are able to still master the standards set by Common Core.

Common Core Reflection

Review the Common Core standards and write an explanation of how you have either mastered this skill or will continue to work on that skill.

Common Core Standard	Emerging	Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations	Explain your choice and how you plan to improve. Give an example of how you've mastered or will master that particular standard.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2a				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2b				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2c				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2d				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2e				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2f				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.5				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.6				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.8				
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9				

Genius Hour Unit Plan

Week Eight Research

Ted Talk Structure Template:

The increasingly popular technology platform, TED, a nonpartisan, nonprofit “devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks” has shown over one billion presentations since 1984. TED has become a tool in the classroom for students to learn new information and analyze speech techniques. A common way for students to share their Genius Hour projects is to create a presentation they can share with their peers. In Bourdieu’s (1986) principle of cultural capital—a form of social power, such as educational qualifications there are specific “profits” which children from different social backgrounds can obtain from the academic “market.” It is important for students to share their work as it is about translating students’ proficiencies with digital media design in exchange for cosmopolitan recognition and status. (Mills 2011) TED has provided templates and instructions for anyone interested in delivering their own TED Talk presentation. TED’s success in sharing ideas is proof that their technique is an effective model for students to use for their own presentations.

TedX Speaker Guide

Teachers can use the TedX Speaker Guide or make a variation of their own.

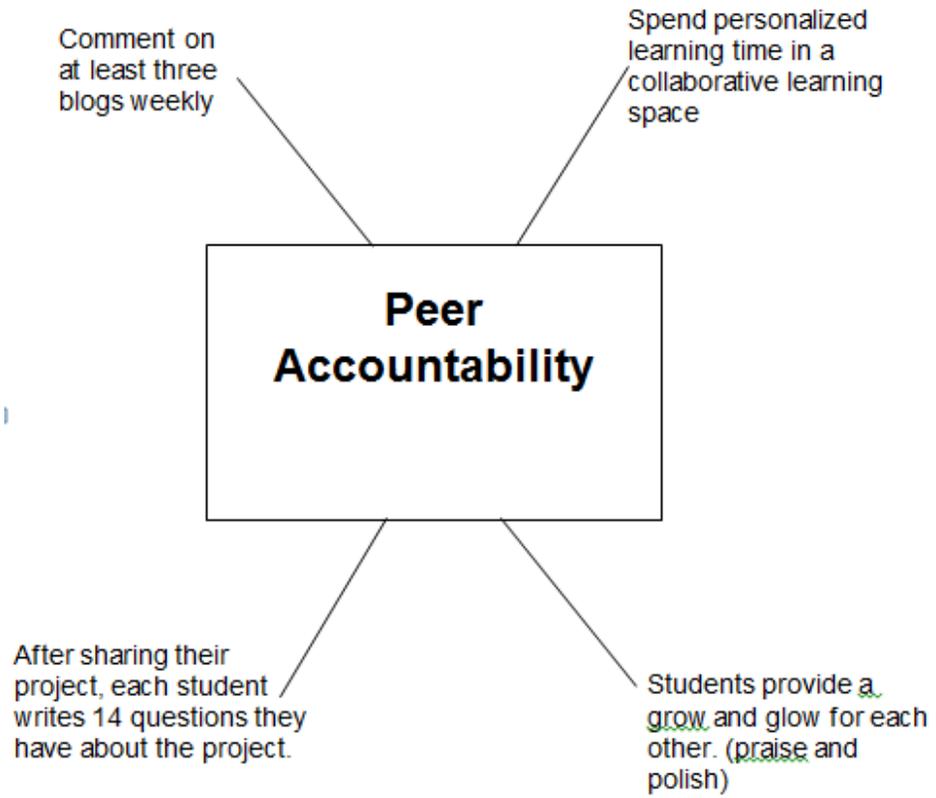
[TedX Speaker Guide](#)

Genius Hour Unit Plan

Week Nine Research

Peer Accountability Web:

When students are expected to share their work with their peers, they are more likely to complete their task to a higher degree than if the teacher were the sole reader. Students typically care greatly about what their peers think. When peers hold each other accountable for their work, the potential for great feedback increases because they are often comfortable with each other and can offer strong insight. Prior research stated students needed unique skills to take on the role of assessor and assessee proficiently (Hovardas et al., 2014). More specifically, learners develop skills to compile judgments about the quality of a peer's work, based on specific expectations of high-quality work (Gielen 2015). Effective feedback messages should provide two types of information: verification and elaboration (Kulhavy & Stock, 1989; Narciss, 2008), and preferably includes both elements (Gielen 20115). When teachers provide structured time for students to give each other feedback, they are more likely to have a positive outcome. Whether a student receives verification that their work is on track or verification that they need to make changes, the experience can be a positive one. Students must also learn to ask questions which kindle elaboration of ideas. Peers helping each other expand their ideas and articulate their thoughts more clearly will have profound prosperity.



Genius Hour Unit Plan

Week Ten Research

The Final Product:

Teachers will garner trust from their students when they offer meaningful projects, and they will create a culture that accepts and even encourages failure as part of the learning process (Wettrick, 2014). Grades are limited in their ability to build connections between interpersonal development and social, cultural and economic constraints. Education viewed through the lens of the human development and capability approach recognizes the need to strategize a curriculum and an education system that bridges the gap between the normative structures in place and the divergent needs of its students for an enriching learning experience (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007).

The Final Product

- ❑ The end result does not have to produce a physical product. There should be a tangible aspect where the audience can see what was made, created, or produced.
- ❑ Students must be able to demonstrate their understanding and results from the Inquiry Process. (see Figure 1)

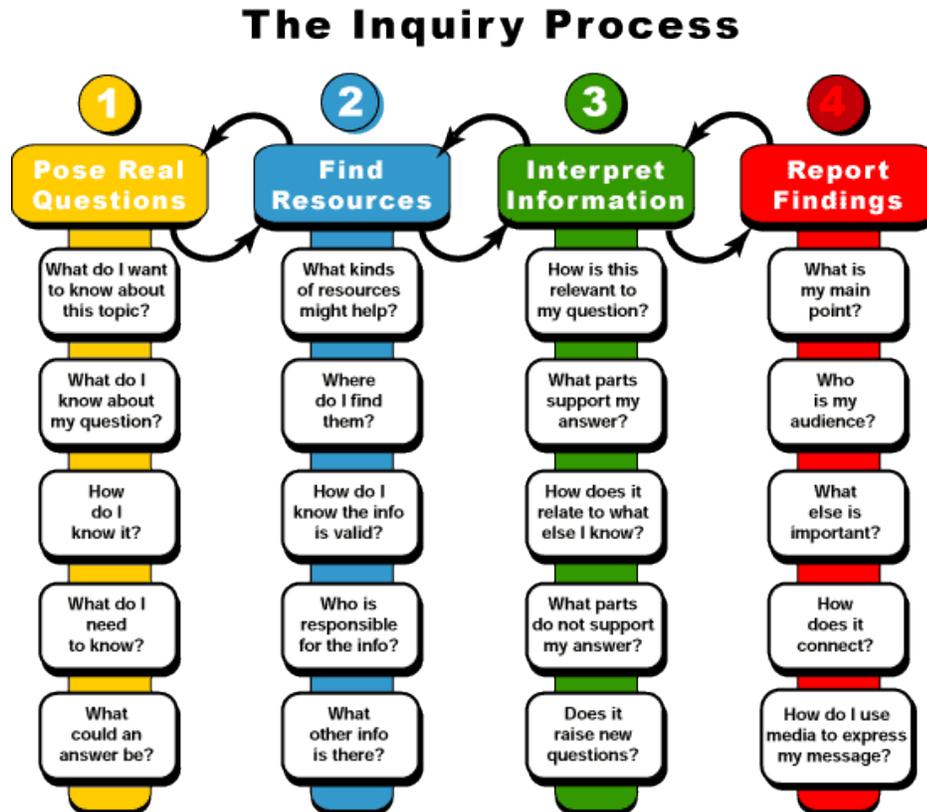


Figure 1

Genius Hour Unit Plan
Reflections and Rubrics Research

Reflections and Rubrics:

“By some estimates, as many as “40 to 60 percent of high school students are chronically disengaged; they are inattentive, exert little effort, do not complete tasks, and claim to be bored. This figure does not include those who already have dropped out” (National Research Council, 2003, p. 18). Educator and author Don Wettrick of *Pure Genius: Building a Culture of Innovation* claims, “Grades for my Innovation Class are not simply a rubric. Rather, students have an opportunity to explain what they learned from the project (Wettrick, 2014, p.37). Evidence suggests schools who emphasize mastery, understanding and improving schools are more successful than school environments which focus on grades and academic performance (Meece 2006). Through Genius Hour, teachers have an opportunity to give students a chance to learn and grow exponentially. Teachers can focus on inspiring and supporting passions rather than the actual completion of the big project (Wettrick, 2014).

Ted Talk Speech Rubric

[Ted Talk Speech Rubric](#)

Four Point Ted Talk Rubric

[4-point Ted Talk Rubric](#)

How will this be graded?

Focusing on grades undermines the culture of innovation and creativity that is supposed to be nurtured with this project. - Kevin Brookhouser

The following table was inspired by Kevin Brookhouser's notes on why creating a rubric will stifle the success of this project.

Grade the algorithmic or objective component of the class -- the parts that demonstrate measurable achievement and work. Great blog posts, proposals, or presentations are mostly formulaic, so grading them motivates success.	Grade the formal proposal as any other writing project with a specific rubric: on both style and substance. Does it answer the required prompt? Does it follow the guidelines for English language conventions?	If students aren't spending their project time actively and passionately working on their project, an adjustment needs to be made, so students are working on something intrinsically motivating.
Grade the end presentation as any other student presentation. Did it meet all of the required elements?		

Rather than using a rubric to grade students' Genius Hour projects, consider using the [Grit Rubric](#) developed by College Track program in San Francisco.

Genius Hour Final Reflection

Write a reflection about your Genius Hour. (3-4 pages) Use the following questions to guide you.

Genius Hour Write your Essential Guiding Question. What were your original goals for this project? What did you learn? What surprised you? Who is your audience for this and how will you present it to them?

Social Justice How does your project serve human rights? What impact will your genius have and what potential does it have? What skill did you learn and how did this skill affect the assignment? What is something you wish you had done, and what can you do next time?

Overall Reflection Wrap up your final thoughts. What was positive about this project and how can it improve? What are any lingering questions you might have? Feel free to pull any ideas from other reflections you've already written.

Grit Rubric

[Grit Rubric](#)

Chapter Five: Project Recommendations

Students in high school typically find themselves juggling six classes, sports, extra-curricular and sometimes jobs or other personal responsibilities. The amount of activities they attempt to balance is enough to leave most adults feeling overwhelmed. Skinner (2008) found when children start the school year with high autonomy; they are more likely to show improvements in their effort and enjoyment as the year progressed. Skinner discovered that students low in autonomy showed increasing disaffection and felt bored, frustrated and were less engaged. Teenagers face many challenges including the pressures of applying to colleges, exceeding in one or multiple sports and of course the social and peer pressures that come with high school. One thing all teens have in common is they have interests they are passionate but rarely do they get opportunities to pursue those passions in their education. Teachers can support students' sense of competency and autonomy by offering opportunities they can be successful at and enjoy (Shernoff, 2003). Likewise, teachers are also balancing the demands of their workload while juggling the multiple facets of their personal lives. This Genius Hour Unit was designed with both busy, impassioned teenagers and dedicated teachers in mind. Once integrated, this unit will help teachers support students' passions and ultimately inspire newfound motivation for school. The purpose of this project was to support and encourage educators to be innovative through a Genius Hour as a means to increase student motivation.

Motivation research finds that when students have choices and are able to have some control over their learning, they will be more inspired and excited about school. This unit will show teachers how they can continue their regular curriculum while guiding students through a passion project where they can still learn Common Core skills and lessons. All of the handouts, developed by myself and Genius Hour educational experts, are available in a hyperdoc so busy

teachers can quickly implement this project in their curriculum. In this chapter, I will discuss the lessons learned while creating the unit, the educational implementations, project implementation, limitations of the project, and future research needed.

Lessons Learned

In developing the Genius Hour Unit, I learned the importance of applying research to lesson plans and curriculum. Laforce (2017) pointed out the important role intrinsic motivation and ability beliefs play in student success. For decades researchers have claimed student success is dependent upon autonomy and their ability to garner some control over what they learn. This project was developed with the premise that students would learn some of the same Common Core skills a teacher would try to teach, but they would also be somewhat autonomous throughout the learning process and perhaps master the skills even better. I gained a deeper understanding of what students are capable of if they are given an opportunity to pursue their passions. Being able to apply something they love to each of their classes will give them a more authentic experience that will likely be something they remember for a lifetime.

If all of the research says students should be given more autonomy, I wondered why it could be challenging for teachers to offer choices. I discovered a misconception about Genius Hour is the idea that the teacher resigns all power to the students and the class becomes a hodge podge of random student projects. The reality of Genius Hour is the teacher takes on the role of a guide and directs students to make the best decision for their project. As a teacher, it is sometimes easier for me to assign the same project for all students and the end product will be relatively the same. Giving students an opportunity to explore their genius can result in an end product that is beyond what I ever would have thought to assign. Empowering students is not the same as a teacher losing power; it simply shows students that we trust that they care about something enough to study it during school.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned from developing this unit is the importance of trusting students to authentically work on this project. If teachers feel they do not have enough control over this project, they can assign a topic or theme for students to focus on. One of the greatest things about Genius Hour is the flexibility for both teachers and students to make adjustments that suit his/her needs. A teacher in any other content area could do Genius Hour in relation to their subject as well. Being that it only takes 20% of class time, it can supplement any unit in any class. If a teacher has the confidence to try Genius Hour, they will learn the value through the students' presentations and as with any project, will improve it after each implementation.

Lastly, I learned the importance of letting students fail. A student may begin their Genius Hour project with the hopes and dreams of curing cancer or solving world hunger, yet in the end, they develop a strong question. It is not the teacher's role during Genius Hour to grade students' ideas but rather to teach them how to develop questions and strategize ways to explore those wonderings. Many brilliant inventions have come to life because of the many failed attempts before. I have found what could be arguably the most important aspect of Genius Hour is that students experience the love of learning. They realize that they can learn how to question, research, write and present on topics that are interesting to them. As their skills develop in these areas, they will be more successful in the moments where they must demonstrate these skills with topics they are less passionate about.

Educational Implications

Based on what I have learned, I would recommend teachers take only the parts of Genius Hour they are comfortable with and make an attempt to implement it in their classes. There is much value in taking risks as a teacher; taking a risk and trying a new project could be as powerful and exciting as it is for the students doing the project. When the majority of research

points towards the direction of giving students choices, it is natural to question why teachers might feel hesitant to give students choices. This Genius Hour unit is designed to help teachers take a chance on their students and try a new project that is supported by research.

I would also recommend teachers choose a theme or topic for their students to focus so that both teachers and students can understand how the project works. For example, the teacher can ask students to think of ways they could improve their school community and focus on a skill they have or want to improve to improve the school. They could focus on a topic such as social justice or community service; the teacher can decide what they think is best for the students. Kevin Brookhouser (2015) mentions that student may have a passion, but if it does not translate into something valuable to something else, it does not belong in a Genius Hour project. This is where the assignment transitions from an open assignment where students can do anything they want, to a guided passion project where teachers support students' passions and help them focus on working towards a purpose.

Project Implementation Plans

The project implementation plans encourage secondary educators in San Diego North County area to implement a Genius Hour unit in their regular curriculum. This particular project will be used in the San Marcos Unified School District by secondary teachers in all content areas. The implementation of this curriculum will encourage more teachers to engage in Genius Hour projects, and students will discuss their projects amongst each other to increase the excitement about doing the project. The more that teachers collaborate with each other to either begin the projects at different times during the school year or share common topics where students could blend the project for both classes in their research, the better experience it will be for the students.

Limitations of Project

If given more time and resources, I would like to create a step-by-step guide for teachers filled with detailed examples of Genius Hour being implemented in classrooms. The more teachers are able to imagine themselves implementing the unit in their classes, the more likely it will actually happen. A beginning teacher may need the step-by-step guide whereas a more veteran teacher will have the confidence and see the flexibility of a project that might seem daunting at first.

Future Research or Project Suggestions

This project was developed to provide teachers a resource they can use in their classrooms that holds authentic value for students and has high potential to get them excited and motivated about school. A study on the impact Genius Hour has on student motivation would be beneficial to the future of successful Genius Hour projects. A possible starting point could be a comparative study of a teacher-driven project to a Genius Hour one. Measuring student success would be a challenge for future research because students are learning an array of skills in addition to potentially outstanding final products. As mentioned earlier, a failed final product does not necessarily mean the student failed at the entire project. As Genius Hour continues to garner popularity and both teachers and students see the benefits in doing a project they both enjoy and learn from, researchers can begin to articulate specific benefits that derive from Genius Hour projects.

The Genius Hour Unit is a project that represents all aspects of current motivation research; one might wonder why all teachers are not yet doing it? It is a challenging project to grade and to a teacher it might feel like they are giving up control. Teachers are very accustomed to grading the final product as much as students are used to being told what to do, how to do it and then getting a score for the end result. Genius Hour can take place over the course of weeks,

months, or an entire school year and the main objective of every project is to enjoy learning and mastering appropriate grade level skills. Future research articulating the benefits of this project would help teachers understand the how and why they should also try this project in their classes. There is a shift in thinking that needs to occur in order to come to a place where they feel comfortable trying something new. Genius Hour goes against what teachers have traditionally known, and change can be intimidating. Ultimately, this project will hopefully inspire more teachers to try Genius Hour in their classroom and motivate students to love school again, or more than they already do.

Summary/Conclusion

In brief, this project created a supplemental unit plan for secondary educators to implement a Genius Hour project in their classrooms as a means to motivate and inspire students. Chapter one outlined the underlying need for students to feel more attached and motivated to school a suggests developing research supported guidebook to help teachers implement Genius Hour as one approach to inspiring students. Chapter two reviews a variety of literature and research regarding students' need for autonomy to be more motivated in schools were discussed. Chapter three looked at the methodology behind developing the Genius Hour Unit. Chapter four contains the entire Genius Hour Unit including a hyperdoc where all handouts can be provided in one document. Chapter five discussed the implications and the lessons learned while creating the unit. Educators want what is best for students and are always looking for ways to give them the best experiences in relation to their curriculum. This Genius Hour Unit seeks to inspire teachers to try something new and give their students an opportunity to pursue their passions. Teachers will be pleasantly surprised with how high students soar when the endless sky is their educational limit.

References

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