

the



project

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The Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School (MELS) is a New York City Department of Education public school in Forest Hills, Queens. As one of the most culturally diverse schools in New York City, MELS serves about 850 students in grades 6 through 12. MELS is “A School for a Sustainable City” and a New York City Outward Bound School. MELS uses the Expeditionary Learning education model, which focuses on student engagement and student achievement through case studies and expeditions. MELS has been recognized as a New York City Department of Education “Showcase School for Collaboration That Fosters Student Achievement.”

In their 9th-grade English class, learners read *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood Up for Education and Was Shot by the Taliban* by Christina Lamb and Malala Yousafzai. During this case study, students learned how an individual enacts change. Learners were asked to explore the idea of creating change by researching an issue within their community. In small groups, learners selected and researched an issue within their community, building understanding of why the issue is a problem. Students then proposed a solution to solve the issue. The issue students chose to research became the focus of their day of service. Students were also required

to create a zine about the issue and share their zine with the community. A zine is a short, self-published work that allows students to express their ideas about an issue in a creative do-it-yourself style.

Collaborative Library Lessons for the Zine Project

During a series of collaborative library lessons, students learned how to research and write to create a zine that showed what they had learned about enacting change. The following learning outcomes were achieved by learners through the Zine Project’s collaborative library lessons.

Library Lesson One Learning Outcome(s): I can identify important characteristics of a zine.

What is a zine? Learners watched a video about zines especially made for the MELS Library by Elizabeth Allen and Nicole Rambo, two youth services librarians from the Middle Country Public Library who have a zine collection in their public library and provide resources and professional development on how to create zines. Students looked at exemplars of zines purchased from the Bluestockings Bookstore and Activist Center. They made observations and added notes to a

note-catcher (another term for a graphic organizer) regarding information content and high-quality craftsmanship. Students were asked: How do you think zines could be used to create change based on what you have learned today?

Library Lessons Two through Four Learning Outcome(s): I can research the issue for my zine by using the Opposing Viewpoints database.

How do I access and use the Opposing Viewpoints database to research the issue for my zine? Students learned how to access the MELS Library website and the Opposing Viewpoints database. Learners discussed what “opposing viewpoints” means and the information available in the database, including multiple perspectives and bias. Learners broke down their research issue by narrowing their topics and developing research questions and keywords. Students then learned how to navigate Opposing Viewpoints by narrowing search results by date, understanding the different content types, utilizing the highlight tool, sharing through the Google Drive, and accessing source citations. Students then engaged in a series of research workshops where they researched,

read articles, used note-catchers, and kept track of sources.

Day-of-Service Workshop Learning Outcome(s): I can design a plan that will be implemented on my day of service to address the issue.

What is a day-of-service workshop? Learners participated in a day-of-service workshop to prepare them for their day of service. The workshop allowed them to learn more about their topic and establish a closer connection to their work to support their community. All 9th-grade educators and the school librarian facilitated a workshop. During the day-of-service workshop hosted by the school librarian, each learner received a day-of-service journal and read expert texts about random acts of kindness and empathy. The workshop focused on *Makers with a Cause: Creative Service Projects for Library Youth* by Gina Seymour, the school librarian at Islip High School. Inspired by Seymour's work, learners brainstormed ways to carry out makerspace projects for their day of service.

Library Lessons Five through Seven Learning Outcome(s): I can brainstorm the appearance of my zine, and I can create a high-quality zine.

What will our zine look like?

Using a zine template created by the grade team that oversaw the case study, learners were introduced to the requirements for the zine. The following questions provided a structure for students to create their zine: What is the issue being presented? Who or what is impacted by the issue? What are the causes/factors creating the issue or making it worse? What solutions have been tried so far, and how effective are they? How can others take action to address the issue? Learners were also introduced to the materials that would be available for creating their zine.

What does my group have to do to complete the zine? Learners worked together to review the zine template and the zine rubric, also created by the grade team, to create a work plan. The work plan allowed students to brainstorm goals for fulfilling certain criteria in the rubric. Learners brainstormed the following: What will our zine look like (regarding craftsmanship/design elements)? What materials do we need from the MELS Library makerspace? Learners then divided zine responsibilities (writing, design, structure) among group members. Students then engaged in a series of workshops where they created their zines.

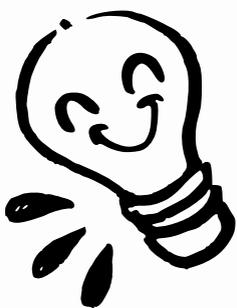
Makerspace materials for the creation of the zines included:

- Cardstock/Scrapbook paper
- Tape/Washi tape
- Sharpies (ultra fine/fine) (black and white/color)
- Gel pens
- Pencils/Colored pencils
- Letter stencils
- Rulers
- Scissors/Scrapbook scissors
- Whiteout/Erasers
- Long-arm staplers
- Printer/Printer paper (black and white/color)
- Copy machine (black and white/color)

Day-of-Service Learning

Outcome(s): I can carry out a day of service that will allow me to take an active role in supporting my community.

What is a day of service? Learners had the opportunity to take action to enact a positive change to address the issue within their community. All 9th-grade educators and the school librarian facilitated a day of service. The following experts and community partners supported this learning experience:



The workshop allowed them to learn more about their topic and establish a closer connection to their work to support their community.

- **Period, End of Sentence** (Educator: Karla Freire) → Lack of access to menstrual products. Learners worked with Restful Nights Organization Inc., a nonprofit homeless shelter and social services agency, to provide menstrual products to a local homeless shelter.
- **Mr. Robot** (Educator: William Hendrick) → Technology in schools. Learners worked with the school aide to fix and update the laptops at MELS.
- **No Empty Bellies** (Educator: Tarin Baxter) → Food insecurity. Learners supported a local food pantry in Forest Hills by packing food and hygiene kits for 800 families.
- **There's a Hair in My Dirt** (Educator: Rebecca Kleinbart) → Reviving the community garden. Learners worked with the Green Team of Forest Hills, a group of volunteers who weed, plant, and clean up community spaces, to revitalize the MELS Community Garden.
- **Big Brother, Big Sister** (Educator: Parese Hankerson) → Role models for students. Learners visited PS 101, a local elementary school, and worked with kindergarten and first-grade students.
- **Heritage of Pride** (Educator: Milrely Cas) → LGBTQ+ community building. Learners worked with Heritage of Pride, a nonprofit organization that plans and produces New York City's official LGBTQIA+ Pride parade, and distributed pamphlets along the designated route for the 2019 NYC Pride March.
- **It's Raining Cats and Dogs** (Educator: Erin Hickey) → Animal homelessness. Learners visited the

Brooklyn Animal Care Center and donated animal toys and blankets.

- **Girls Incorporated** (Educator: Jenna-Lyn Zaino) → Supporting women's equality. Learners learned how to empower women by working with Girls Inc., a nonprofit organization that focuses on the development of whole girls.
- **Makers with a Cause** (School Librarian: Jillian Ehlers) → Random acts of kindness. Learners spoke with Gina Seymour and demonstrated random acts of kindness for members of their community.

Library Lesson Eight Learning Outcome(s): I can reflect on my day-of-service experience.

What did I do during my day of service to address the issue?

Learners debriefed after their day of service. They thought about what their groups did to create a service project that supported their community and how the experience allowed them to enact change. Learners focused on the following questions: What issue did you address on your day of service? What have you learned about the issue through the workshop day and day of service? What did you learn about being a responsible member of your community? Do you think your actions were successful in addressing the issue? Why or why not? How will you continue to support or take action to address the issue in the future?

Library Lesson Nine Learning Outcome(s): I can correctly cite my sources using MLA format.

How do I correctly cite my sources?

While citations were available through the Opposing Viewpoints database, it was important that students discuss the importance of intellectual property and create a

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works cited page. Learners viewed a brief video about citing sources and formatting an MLA works cited page. They then focused on understanding the anatomy of an MLA citation, as well as alphabetizing the sources and line spacing. Students looked at some exemplars and made observations and connections to new learning. They then worked together and gathered their research sources and created a works cited page for their zine.

Library Lesson Ten Learning Outcome(s): I can share my learning experiences with the community.

What is a gallery walk? A gallery walk gave learners the opportunity to share their learning with others in a gallery-like setting. The zines were put on display around the MELS Library. Learners used the opportunity to share their zines and their learning experiences from the day of service. Students rotated in small groups, reading and discussing the zines. Each small group consisted of at least one creator from each zine. This way students were either the speaker or the listener when they got to each zine. The speaker shared a summary of their experience and key points from their learning. The listeners were able to ask questions.

Collaborative Planning at MELS

Collaborative planning is required to manage the case studies educators oversee. Once a week at MELS, grade



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teams meet to discuss structures and plans for case studies and expeditions. All meetings are facilitated by the grade-team leader and consist of all educators from the grade. These meetings may include the administration, the school designer, and the school librarian. The purpose of these meetings is to ensure that educators have an opportunity to collaborate and that learners are supported and challenged to create high-quality work. During this time educators also determine ways to engage students in fieldwork, identify expert collaborators, and facilitate research and service learning, all key aspects of the Zine Project. Throughout the week, smaller groups of educators may also meet to collaborate.

The Zine Project Collaborative Process

I worked with Erin Hickey, the 9th-grade English educator, and Rachel Demalderis, the 9th-/10th-grade special education educator, on the collaborative library lessons for the Zine Project. The following is a snapshot of our planning meetings for the project.

Before the collaborative library lessons began, we met to plan

extensively, since we decided that these lessons would take place over the course of ten weeks. We first set student achievement goals. We then determined topics and skills, outlined learning objectives, and we organized a calendar with lesson dates, including the day-of-service workshop and the day of service. Finally, we created the project descriptor, the zine rubric, and the zine template.

Once the collaborative library lessons began, we met weekly. During the planning meetings, we would decide on the outline of the upcoming lesson and then delegate roles and responsibilities focusing on content skills and educator strengths (i.e., who would write the warm-up, who would create the note-catcher, who would teach the skills of the learning objective, who would prepare the laptops). All lessons were co-taught, and depending on the lesson, different educators would facilitate different parts of the lesson (i.e., the English educator might facilitate the warm-up, the special education educator might frame the lesson and facilitate the exit ticket, and the school librarian might provide the skills lesson through modeling and guided practice). However, all three of us would provide learners with

individual/group support during any workshop time. After a few lessons, we no longer had to meet face to face and were able to collaborate through e-mail and share lesson plans through the Google Drive.

After we completed the collaborative library lessons, all three of us sat down for a final reflection to identify keepers and polishers for 2019–2020. The discussion began with the following questions: What could we do differently to enhance student achievement? What new experts can we invite to engage students? Can we add more fieldwork to deepen learning experiences for learners? How can we better manage our time? Do we need to tackle different learning objectives? Do we need to rearrange the order of the lessons? How can we get the community more involved in the final gallery walk? Can we distribute the zines beyond our school community?

Tips for Collaborative Planning

Attend Meetings. At MELS, the grade-team leader sends out a weekly e-mail, which includes important information, academic dates, and the agenda for the weekly grade-team



for the school librarian to advocate and educate.

Build Relationships. Telling educators that you can enhance their learning objectives, student engagement, and student achievement through collaboration is the first step. Now you need to prove it! I might start by showing how I can support with writing and teaching the lesson plan(s), creating the slideshow(s) and note-catcher(s), and providing the technology and resource(s). But once the educators and students are in the school library, it is game on! My goal is to not just transform learning for students, but also to transform teaching for educators. In my experience, successful collaboration always leads to future collaboration. As the school year progresses, word of mouth from educators and learners will generate an interest in the support that you can provide. So, maybe start with one grade, one teacher, one class, and build from there. We are the experts; they might not even realize that they need us until we show them.

Conclusion

The Zine Project aligned with the AASL *National School Library Standards* in many ways, but the Collaborate Shared Foundation was at the heart of the project. During the project, learners participated in a variety of learning communities with peers, educators, and experts who worked collaboratively to deepen their understanding of an issue and enacting change.

My work on the Zine Project was inspired by the American Library Association's Zine Pavilion. Check out their website for more information <<https://zinepavilion.tumblr.com/>>.

meeting. At the beginning of the school year, I ask to be added to all the grade-team e-mails. Yes, that is a lot of e-mails, since we are a 6th- through 12th-grade school, but it is well worth it. This way I can read the weekly e-mails and decide which grade team meeting to attend that would provide the best opportunity for collaboration.

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During this meeting I can suggest something as small as a digital tool or a digital resource, or I could suggest something as big as inviting classes into the school library for a research lesson or a series of project workshops. I go to these meetings with an arsenal of tools in my toolbelt, ready for anything. When educators are in the planning process, it is the perfect opportunity



Jillian Ehlers is the school librarian at the Metropolitan Expeditionary Learning School in Forest Hills,

New York. She is the president-elect for the New York City School Librarians' Association. She is a member of ALA and serves on the ALA Graphic Novels and Comics Round Table Committee. Jillian is also a member of AASL and serves as the co-chair of the 2021 AASL National Conference Committee and member of the AASL Inspire Special Event Grant Committee. She was awarded an AASL Inspire Special Event Grant in 2017 and the AASL Collaborative School Library Award in 2020.

The Zine Project Collaborating Educators

- Jillian Ehlers: 6th-12th-Grade School Librarian
- Erin Hickey: 9th-Grade English Educator
- Rachel Demalderis: 9th-/10th-Grade Special Education Educator

Day-of-Service Collaborating Educators

- Karla Freire: 9th-Grade Spanish Language Educator
- William Hendrick: 9th-Grade Social Studies Educator
- Tarin Baxter: 9th-Grade French Language Educator
- Rebecca Kleinbart: 9th-Grade Math Educator
- Pareese Hankerson: 9th-/10th-Grade Special Education Educator
- Milreyly Cas: 9th-Grade Health Educator
- Jenna-Lyn Zaino: 9th-Grade Science Educator