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Raising Student Voice Through 21st Century Skills, Activism, and Remix

It's 2018. We are getting deeper and deeper into the 21st century. "21st century learning" has been a catchphrase in education for the past twenty-five years, but are educators truly teaching about and expecting students to showcase 21st century skill sets in their classroom? This rural educator is and you can too with simple frameworks and ideas to allow students to continue to practice their skills and raise their voices about a topic or issue they truly care about.

Even though my students are settled in a rural community, they have been able to connect to the outside world through the Take Action Project and the Remix Take Action Project. The initial project, the Take Action Project, has students expanding their understanding of a topic or issue previously studied, locating a new audience, enacting positive activism, and negotiating change with the new audience. To further their understanding and excitement about their project, the remix has been created to allow the students to revisit their project with a fresh mindset and pool of ideas to further communicate their vision to a larger audience while still maintaining their authentic voices and beliefs.

The Take Action Project was created to provide students an opportunity to focus on one of the issues or current events previously studied throughout the year from the Article of the Week unit. Topics were selected by the teacher and were either current events or current topics of interest to students. Based on Kelly Gallagher's assignment, students were assigned an Article

of the Week each Monday; provided with general instruction on annotations, identifying important information, and reflection expectations; and then discussed it in small groups and as a class at the end of the week. After completing each weekly article, another Article of the Week is assigned the following week and the cycle repeats itself. Toward the end of the year, students select a topic they were interested in, propose a project to “take action” on an issue or problem, and assigned to make positive changes on the project.

This type of activism project can be adapted to a wide variety of classroom settings and attendees would be able to view this in action in a rural setting, and be provided with a framework for implementation into their specific setting. Attendees will walk away with materials that will allow them the ability to implement both the Article of the Week year-long unit and Take Action Project into their classrooms.

In addition, to these resources, a remix unit that incorporates the Article of the Week unit and the Take Action Project will be showcased with the framework required to implement. The remix project is based on an understanding of hip hop and its implementation into the educational setting. In order for students to understand hip hop’s true beginnings and integration into popular culture today, students begin by watching *Hip-hop Evolution*, a Netflix documentary. After watching each episode students engage in writing and discussion about what hip hop is and how its interest and popularity has spread over the course of time.

For the remix, students are encouraged to take their Take Action Projects that required them to find an audience outside of their teacher and classmates and reach a broader audience. With over 70% of students on social media as of late, students should have no issue connecting with their broader audience about their topic (Watson & Marciano, 2015, p. 37).

Students are expected to remix their project into a new medium such as social media, music, or art and still communicate the original message that the first format of the project reached. Without placing too many parameters on the students' thinking, it is intended that students incorporate what was observed after watching *Hip-Hop Evolution* to remix and adapt the original project into a song with catchy and/or meaningful lyrics that drive home the original message. Students could also recreate their message into a piece of art or a series of posts on social media with intuitive hashtags that promote their message to the rest of the world.

This type of work showcases how and why students can use their voices to enact change and promote justice within their communities and classrooms by utilizing technology to do so. It also furthers Watson's and Marciano's belief that students can be included in the conversation about how and why their literacies matter and should be valued within the content and curriculum teachers are required to cover throughout the year (p. 43).

Both of these projects incorporate "new forms of civic participation" (Marciano & Watson, 2017, p. 62) as most students are used to "sit and get" in a classroom day in and day out. By having students actively participate in their learning it caters to their specific learning style, lets students work at their own pace within parameters established by the teacher, and also allow the teacher to differentiate instruction or expectations to meet each student's needs as a learner. The remix project also promotes the multiliteracy practices available and accessible to students outside of school. This opportunity allows the student and teacher to center "curriculum and teaching in multiliteracies practices already present in youth's lived in experiences" (Watson, 2016, p. 57). Attendees will walk away with a refreshed outlook on how they can incorporate both "21st century skills" and student voice into their classrooms when they return to them.

References

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