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Advancing Literacy: Using a Project Based Learning Academy to Increase Literacy Performance

CORRIE A. TUTTLE AND MEGAN ADAMS

Our study looks at achievement of students in one 9th grade English/Language Arts (ELA) class. The goals of this study were to identify what elements of a new academy—here called “JA Academy”—were working well for students in their ELA class. Students who participated in this study were identified based on their Scholastic Reading Inventory (SRI) test that is given pre and post in their first semester of 9th grade ELA. In order to determine what elements of the JA Academy were working well for students, the SRI scores were analyzed carefully. Only students who scored more than two levels below grade level in reading were included in the original pool of potential participants; this was true for all but two of the students in the course. Then, students who showed the largest gains in reading achievement were invited to participate. This selection of participants was utilized in order to see what methods in the academy and in ELA were most impactful on students who showed gains of at least one grade level in reading over the course of the semester. It is important to note that that level of reading growth indicates increases in reading comprehension, fluency, and vocabulary for high school readers (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2013).

Background

JA Academy is a model that was new to the school when the study took place in 2017–2018. Prior to JA Academy, Westside High School (a pseudonym) utilized a traditional block schedule and all courses were taught according to a traditional model (separate subjects for grades 9–12 with content areas operating independently). JA Academy is a model where students engage in real-world projects that are integrated into all core classes. Students engage with a variety of industries and professions, and identify career goals while working through the program.

Students receive support in post-graduation planning, and student present projects to representatives in the corporate world based upon “case challenges.” These challenges come to the teachers as a base for lesson plans. For this reason, a 9th grade ELA teacher may be teaching novels about social movements while students are preparing an advertising campaign to get the community involved in a project for a corporation. This model raises questions about achievement: Are students still accomplishing all of their content area competencies or is anything being sacrificed for the new curriculum mandated by the JA Model?

Along with the question of whether a new 9th grade academy model improves literacy achievement, researchers were looking to see how and if this model affected students’ beliefs about themselves as learners. Since the JA Academy model used in this school has only been in place since 2015, there is not any published research about its effects on literacy achievement or student beliefs. The JA Academy model provides a unique structure for teachers to collaboratively teach using inquiry-based (or project based) learning. This study fills a gap in the literature on both the impact of the academy on literacy achievement and the perceptions of students about the academy experience. The students involved in this study are the first full-year class of freshman starting JA Academy at Westside High School. Please note that Westside High School is a Title I school with only 41% of students performing on grade level in 2018 on the state standardized test (as opposed to the state average of 59%) (Georgia Department of Education, 2018). Students in this title one school are both racially and economically marginalized. The demographics of the school are 67% Hispanic, 26.8 percent African American, and 3.9 percent white. 79.7 percent of students receive free/reduced priced lunch).



Figure 1. Credit [Alexis Brown](#).

Problem Statement

The marginalization of students and communities based upon race and socioeconomic status are two of many reasons for the opportunity gap in American education today (Darling-Hammond, 2010; 2015; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Paris, 2012). High-needs high schools around the US are constantly seeking new methods to help close the opportunity gap (Darling-Hammond, 2015), and one that is often used is to create academies either within a school or outside of the traditional public school (Osler & Waden, 2012). This study looks at a new academy model that was created in 2015 through a partnership with a major non-profit organization, school leaders, and business leaders in a large city in the American Southeast. The JA Academy model was created based upon the assumption that equitable access to high quality education impacts economic opportunity. As one participant put it, “I feel like it [JA Academy] was going to help me with my future.” This case study investigates the experiences of freshmen from the first full year class participating in the new academy model at one high school. These students showed gains in reading achievement and engagement throughout their freshman year, and their voices are highlighted here. This article is important for the literature on moving literacy forward; the voices of the students show a model that is allowing students to experience academic empowerment for the first time in their schooling. This study was conducted by a teacher researcher and a faculty member at a local university. It is a blend of the literature on Project Based Learning (PBL) and a teacher practitioner voice, and the theoretical framework is

embedded in each section. This article is most appropriate for teacher practitioners and school leaders looking to improve literacy through PBL and inquiry-based literacy approaches.

Conceptual Framework

Student achievement is directly related to students’ academic identities (Gee, 2000). Developing a positive academic identity is tied to experiences with success and feelings of self-worth in the classroom (Gee & Green, 2000). In order for 9th graders to develop a positive academic identity, they must connect to school and see the value of the work they are accomplishing (Darling-Hammond, 2010; 2015). This leads to innovations in curriculum models—both those that ultimately increase student achievement and those that do not. Curriculum models developed by teachers and their students are most effective, however, and far too often curriculum models are dictated by entities outside of the school (Brennan, 2015). All curriculum models need investigation and refinement in order for instruction to impact student achievement. In this case, critiquing those models may first be done with a review of literature related to 9th grade curriculum models, including 9th grade academies (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2017). This research was developed and refined following a review of literature on curriculum models for 9th graders in order to address the research questions.

Research Questions

1. How does participation in a 9th grade academy impact students’ performance on literacy assessments in language arts courses for students who show significant growth in reading (one grade level or more of improvement in one semester)?
2. How does participation in a 9th grade academy impact students’ perceptions of academic performance in language arts courses for students who are showing significant literacy growth?

Review of Literature

Using a 9th Grade Academy Model to improve reading. This academy model seeks to give students real-world, engaging instruction through a case methodology or problem-based learning (PBL) approach. This model promotes a school within a school academy that mimics the population of the school as a whole. English language learners (ELL), students

with disabilities (SWD), and minoritized students are all encouraged to apply and are accepted based on interest in the program. (Please note the researchers use the terms “English language learners” and “students with disabilities” to align with the language used by the school and academy and advertised to attract applicants.) This program is only a few years old; therefore, the researchers knew the research on using this academy model in a 9th grade academy would have little literature. However, 9th grade academy models—broadly—have been in place for some time.

9th Grade Academies. In one state, a large-scale study found that 9th grade academies decreased drop-out rates, contributed to the success of marginalized students, and increased attendance rates (Osler & Waden, 2013). Several studies found that 9th grade academies had similar impacts, with additional benefit in allowing students to see the collaboration of teachers and feel part of a community (Brennan, 2015; Osler & Waden, 2012; 2013). These findings indicate that 9th grade academies, broadly speaking, are important for marginalized children. For teachers, the benefit of collaboration is important as well. Studies found that teacher satisfaction increased when collaboration on assessments and goals were in place, and teacher satisfaction has a significant impact on student success (Brennan, 2015; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Teachers who feel satisfied are more likely to create caring classrooms and schools, which impacts student success and satisfaction. Seeing the 9th grade academy as a “community of care” was equally important; the transition from middle school to high school is emotionally distressing for many students (Ellerbrock & Kiefer, 2014). The benefit for both teachers and students when the community of care is in place is a critical finding. For students to succeed, they must feel they are in a caring relationship with their teachers and schools, and 9th grade academies are one way to make sure that is in place (Boutte & Bryan, 2019; Caldera, Whitaker, & Conrad, 2020; Noddings, 2005; Shussler & Collins, 2006).

Case Challenges, PBL, Inquiry-Based Literacy. Project-based and inquiry-based learning are primarily found in studies of science literacy and in middle school classrooms (Blumenfeld, Krajcik, Marx, & Soloway, 1994; Rosenfield & Ben-Hur, 2001). Project-based learning has roots in inquiry learning and is a pedagogy utilized allowing students to solve a problem through the content (Rosenfield & Ben-Hur, 2001). Less frequently are studies found connecting PBL or inquiry-based learning with literacy in other content areas in high school, especially in ELA and math (Condiff, 2017; Kingston, 2018).

In part, this is due to the fact that content area literacy has deep roots and has been studied extensively (Alvermann, Gillis, & Phelps, 2013).

9th grade Academies for Culturally and Economically Marginalized Youth. The literature indicates that under-resourced schools have unequal access to beneficial school partnerships (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2017). School partnerships are critical in developing social capital (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2017), which are needed to develop increased knowledge, resources, legitimacy in the eyes of the community, and access for students to the benefits the partner has to offer. Of course, many articles reviewed describe the need for 9th grade academies as more important for “low performing schools” (Fleishman & Heppen, 2009). The researchers reject the “low performing” label prevalent since No Child Left Behind (O’Day, 2008). Instead, the focus must be on under-resourced schools and models that improve access for students (Bridwell-Mitchell, 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Thus, the literature reviewed on culturally and economically marginalized youth supports the use of PBL and inquiry-based learning through lessons and units like those utilized in this study (Welton, Harris, La Londe, & Moyer, 2015).

High school students must be given the opportunity to participate in social justice education and equitable education partner opportunities (Welton, Harris, La Londe, & Moyer, 2015). “Unfortunately, students marginalized based on their race, social class, ability, linguistic background, gender identity, or sexuality...regularly encounter school policies and practices that, by and large, culturally de-capitalize, devalue, and strip away aspects of their identity” (Welton, Harris, La Londe, & Moyer, 2015, p. 550). The context of the study below will illustrate an academy model and instructional unit that seek to culturally capitalize and place value on aspects of identity.

Context of the Study

In the academy’s 9th ELA classes, the teacher researcher uses basically the same daily curriculum as the other 9th ELA teachers at her school. As a team, 9th ELA teachers have worked hard over the past few years to focus curriculum on culturally relevant texts/experiences within the frameworks of county mandated curriculum. The 9th grade ELA team of teachers all have a fairly similar pedagogy and have created a PBL for the last unit of study where students are asked to find and research a problem at their school or in their community

and come up with a solution. This collaborative approach is exactly the type of design Brennan (2015) suggests. Students must present their collaborative studies to the entire 9th grade team, enhancing many skills.

The academy students' presentation skills are also more advanced than their non-academy peers. In the past, the teacher researcher noted having to spend a few lessons teaching presentation skills, but that is no longer necessary for students in the academy. The ability to collaborate, think outside the box, and problem solve are some important soft skills that businesses are looking for in future hires that they say schools and colleges are not adequately teaching (Elliott, 2015; Farrington, 2014; Hart Research Associates, 2015; Klaus, 2007; Magogwe et al., 2014). The academy model focuses on teaching many of these soft skills, putting academy students at an advantage.

As one of the English teachers in the program, in addition to the stated research goals, the teacher researcher's goal was to further her use of PBL as well as use the opportunity to measure how the program impacted reading growth in her students. Partnered with a colleague in Secondary Education at a local university, she used Scholastic Reading Inventory pre and post assessments and observation to determine which students would participate in the focus group and interview sessions. This led to 12 students being interviewed individually by the teacher-researcher and collectively participating in a focus group with both researchers. The students in this school are predominantly from minoritized populations and represent culturally and socioeconomically underrepresented groups (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 1998; Paris, 2012).

Case Challenges: How the Students Complete Work

The case challenges are the crux of this academy model. In each unit, across content areas, students are presented with a problem to solve for a local or national business. Through their business classes, teams of students then present their solution to the class, winning teams are chosen from all the business classes, and those winning teams present to the companies.

Concurrently, teachers in the core content areas teach one or two lessons that directly connect to the current case challenge. For example, one case challenge asked students to decide whether a national insurance provider should sell a new plug in car device that helped determine mechanical problems to car dealerships or directly to consumers. In ELA,

students looked at the world of insurance through the lens of characters in *Romeo and Juliet*. Students had to determine what type of insurance made the most sense for a specific character. One of the teacher's favorite examples was that students wanted to sell Tybalt sword insurance since he loved to fight (see Appendix A for lesson plan). In algebra, students used linear functions to determine costs of having the device versus not. In environmental science, students looked at car use and the impact fossil fuel consumption has on the environment. While in geography, students looked at car use across the globe and how modernization has affected the growth of civilizations. In all of the academy students' core classes, teachers were talking about the case challenge and working on it within the confines of their subject area.

Each semester, the case challenges for 9th grade are different, and the school is on semester blocks. So for fall, there may be one case challenge that focuses on marketing during the *Romeo and Juliet* lesson, while in the spring, the case challenge during the *Romeo and Juliet* unit may focus on creating a strategic plan or using a decision tree (see Appendix A for sample lesson plan). It was noted above that students used a decision tree to determine what type of insurance to sell to a character in the play; they also used that same tool to begin an essay responding to the question, "Who is to blame for the deaths in the play?" This is one way the interdisciplinary piece comes into play in an ELA class; it is also a way to avoid scripted teaching or teaching "to the test" (Powell, Cantrell, & Correll, 2017).

One challenge asked students to create a marketing plan to generate more interest with teens in their company (a national fast food company). During this case challenge, students were working on the social movement unit where students choose an American social movement that they research and then teach the rest of the class. To incorporate the case challenge, the teacher researcher had students determine how to best "sell" their social movement to their target audience—teens. Students had to create a marketing plan that garnered interest and involvement in their social movement using social media and other mediums that connected to their movement and appealed to their target audience. While this lesson did not directly relate to the fast food company, it did ask students to complete the same task—creating teenage interest in something. How the teacher researcher chooses to connect the case challenge to the curriculum is flexible, but teachers are asked to submit a lesson plan to the academy director per challenge (about three times a semester).

Methodology and Framework of the Study

Case study methodology was most appropriate for several reasons. First, the two researchers traditionally follow a transformative worldview. However, for this current study, both researchers felt that a constructivist worldview was most appropriate (Hyslop-Margison & Strobel, 2007; Neuman & Guteman, 2016). We wanted to observe how the model was working and collect student feedback; we were not interested in making any changes. We wanted to construct meaning alongside the students in order to provide feedback for the school and community. We also wanted to highlight students’ voices, a noticeable gap in the literature. The case study methodology was most appropriate for the bounded system we were working within as well. This is a study of a small population of students in a particular school using a particular 9th grade academy model. The case study tradition allowed the researchers to co-construct meaning based upon the voices of students in the system as participants (Stake, 1995). Data collection occurred in a layered approach. First, the teacher researcher administered the pre-test using Scholastic Reading Inventory. The post-test was administered near the end of the semester. Based upon literacy gains, students were identified as potential participants (see Table 1).

Following agreement to participate, each student (12) was interviewed individually and participated in a focus group session. Students member checked data from each session to be sure their words were captured with fidelity allowing for triangulation of data. Both researchers participated in the focus group, and the teacher researcher conducted the 1:1 interviews to ensure students were comfortable in the environment (her classroom). The testing is a normal part of the data collected by the 9th grade teachers in the school.

Data Analysis. Both researchers analyzed the data using a cyclical approach. Each researcher went through the transcripts of the interviews first, using a critical lens to create codes (Stake, 1995). The researchers then read the others’ annotated interviews, looking for similar codes emerging. Following an agreement on those codes, the same process occurred for the focus groups. A shared, locked folder on Google Drive was used for this process. At the conclusion of this process, the researchers met to discuss the themes that had emerged from the codes. A final list of codes and themes was used to go through each annotated document again, examining the students’ words for evidence of the codes and themes. Finally, the researchers created the larger categories

included in the findings below. Data were described according to these themes.

Hearing from Students: How the Academy Worked for Them

The students who made the greatest gains, 15 total, were asked to participate in focus groups and interviews. As noted in the introduction, all but two students were performing two grade levels below in literacy. These 15 showed at least one grade level gain according to their SRI scores, utilized by the district. As in many schools, the students were placed in this course based upon their performance. The students invited showed statistically significant gains in literacy and could, therefore, speak best to what was working well. Three students declined; 12 students participated. These students described feeling more engaged and connected when seeing how themes from one class were repeated in others. They also felt like they were part of a close community of students and teachers with similar goals. One student noted that assignments can be intimidating until you make sense of

Table 1
Participants and Test Scores

Student #	1st Test	Score	2nd Test	Score
1.	8/18	447	4/19	823
2.	1/19	915	4/19	1181
3.	1/19	1051	4/19	1266
4.	1/19	749	4/19	1004
5.	8/18	1170	12/18	1378
6.	8/18	624	12/18	809
7.	8/18	805	12/18	958
8.	1/19	824	4/19	961
9.	8/18	1138	12/18	1271
10.	1/19	1186	4/19	1309
11.	1/19	859	4/19	976
12.	1/19	1000	4/19	1115

them with the group. “I mean the questions! Sometimes you don’t understand [the case challenge] and you’re like Oh My God what is happening! And then, like the budget one? The millennials one? About insurance? I was so confused in the beginning” This, according to the students, led to increased effort in their courses. “In middle school I barely turned in anything. But now I turn in stuff.” The students describe increases that are illustrated by the numbers in their Scholastic Reading Inventory post-tests. The themes constructed after data analysis are engagement, feeling connected, increased effort, self-efficacy, and an increase in reading scores. This is noted by a student describing the difference in performance. “In middle school Language Arts, it [her performance] was bad. It was low. Writing was bad too. I didn’t understand. In reading now, I’m middle. I’m still not good at writing, so I am low in that area. My confidence in reading and writing was low. But now, my confidence is high.”

Interdisciplinary Nature of the Program and Student Engagement

Students described feeling like they saw work repeated in multiple venues. For example, students were able to use their business class to put work together highlighting projects they completed. One student noted that he “learned to use math in the presentations when we were creating them.” Another said that he “learned to work different software on the computer. This semester I was learning how to work on PowerPoint. Last semester was Word. We took certification tests on Microsoft so when it comes to job applications we have special skills we can list.” One student said, “I guess it’s helped me in math and in this class [ELA]. For example, the case challenges I had to read and understand the problem it helped me write. And in math, it helped me doing like, putting the math in real world problems.” Another student noted that the case challenges were specifically what improved his belief about his abilities in ELA class.

Discussion of engagement and interdisciplinary programs. There is ample literature to support interdisciplinary planning and PBL in high school (Cotton, 2019; Marlatt, 2018; Robeck & Wallace, 2017), but there are traditionally time and scheduling constraints that keep this from occurring with fidelity (Herro & Quigley, 2016; Reinhard, 2017). At Westside, interdisciplinary planning is a challenge due to block scheduling. Not all students have math and ELA during the same semester, so teachers cannot really plan lessons to be delivered simultaneously together, a goal of the JA Academy.

However, all students have the same business class, so all content area teachers can plan lessons that interact with the business curriculum. Westside has also continued to have weekly collaborative team meetings where academy teachers at each grade level meet and discuss students (successes and concerns), case challenges, and academic content. As is seen in the responses from students, this leads to students describing how the content work is all connected. Students also clearly describe how the collaboration with peers helps them make sense of the content, as was quoted above referencing the insurance assignment.

Feeling Connected to the School and Community

Students reported that the academy model helped them feel more connected to both the school and community of peers in their cohort. One student said, “[I] got to talk to people I never would have talked to. I made new friends and learned how to work with other people.” Many students in the focus group also reported that they were forced to work with people they did not really know, or that they did not like. They said that this was good and bad, but overall, they thought it was positive to be forced to work with a variety of other students.

In addition to feeling more connected to their peers, students also indicated that they felt more cared for by their teachers. One phrase students repeated the most during the focus group was that their academy teachers just “cared more.” One student said, “My teachers in middle school didn’t care... cause they just gave us a question and did the answer and left it there. Our teachers were always telling us how high school teachers won’t be easy on you, they probably won’t care if you do the work or not. When I went to high school, they were more open to things and more chill.” Other students reported that teachers in the academy are “more helpful,” and more “interactive and they know us,” indicating that “if you don’t get your work, you can ask your teacher and they can help you out more.”

Caring and feeling connected. One major benefit as a teacher in the academy is that students are in a cohort model, and teachers all have the same students. This is why the students feel more connected: they are with the same peers (thus forced to work with students they do not know). If a teacher is having a problem with a student, the first response is to walk down the hall, talk to their other teachers, and see if there is a pattern. This fits more with the middle school team model of

teaching, but for teachers in a high-needs high school, it has been quite popular. It helps ensure that students are known by a group of teachers who they know care and will ensure they do not slip through the cracks in a large (2000+) school. This is also why the students feel that teachers are more caring. Both authors feel strongly that there is caring present, but we also believe that students notice the caring more because of the connected nature of the program.

Increased Effort

Another benefit students described from the academy experience was that their perceived effort increased. One student noted that this year “I did better in school than other years. Last year I was slacking—I tried harder.” Many students in the focus group echoed this statement and said they actually tried more this year compared to middle school. Almost all also indicated that they procrastinate less and put in more effort this year. Another commonly repeated phrase was that students just “care more” compared to in middle school.

Student Self-Efficacy

In addition to improving their perceived effort in school, students also reported an increase in their confidence in their own abilities. All students responded to a question about their confidence level in ELA (specifically reading, writing, and listening/speaking) in middle school compared to now. Almost all of the students replied that their confidence was much stronger now in all three areas. One student said that in middle school his confidence was “low ‘cause I didn’t really read out loud and stuff because I didn’t care.” And when asked about now he replied, “well every time you ask me to read aloud, I will read because I’m more confident.” Another student said that now “the presentations really helped me come out and not be shy.” One of the teacher researcher’s strongest students, who has ADHD and an IEP, noted that he “used to be on meds in 7th grade, but he’s been trying to focus and learn to do his work without them.” The same student said, “This year has been the most successful year I’ve had so far.” When asked about his confidence levels, he replied, “It improved. I would say listening/speaking in middle school-5, now an 8.5; reading in middle school, I was confident, but I’m at a 9 now; writing in middle school-4; now-8.” Overall, all of the students in this study said that the academy model helped improve their own confidence in reading, writing,

and listening/speaking. Not one of the students said their confidence level went down in those three areas during the move from middle to high school.

Effort and efficacy. The teacher researcher noted from the beginning of the study that students were putting in more effort than she had seen in previous years. In part, she believes this is due to the fact that assignments are repeated across content areas. For example, when students work on an essay for the business class as part of their writing work in ELA, they see how the courses are connected in ways that lead to their increased effort and sense of efficacy. They understand that the grade for one will also count for the other; most importantly the students see that there is a reason to do the work. The writing improvements in ELA are connected directly to proposals in business that will be submitted to companies; students see that there is a professionalism required in their writing in ways they did not prior to the Academy.

Reading: Improvements According to the Data

In 9th grade, the lexile bands that Scholastic publishes state that on grade level is 1050 and above. As noted on the chart in Table 1, eight out of the twelve students started 9th grade significantly below grade level, while only six ended the semester below grade level. Out of those who did not achieve “on grade-level” status, those six made 1233 points of gain, which averages to 203.8 points of lexile gain each. On average, 9th grade students are expected to gain about 50 points a year, so these students far outscored their peers (Archer, 2010; Lupo, Strong, & Smith, 2019). The whole group of selected students made 2283 points of gain, which averages 190.25 each. The largest gain in the group, number one, made 376 points gain, and while he is still below grade level, he has also only been in the United States for two years. His gains impressed everyone even further when seen through the lens of his recent immigration. He noted that when he moved to the United States (two years prior), “I couldn’t do anything, I didn’t understand anything. Most of my teachers said they were proud of me because not knowing the language but my grades were high. I feel like this year—I mean, I feel like nothing has changed but at the same time everything has changed.” He goes on to note that “last year I had to think about how to say, how to pronounce, some words, but now they just come out.”

While the data is in part skewed by choosing students with the largest gains, it should be noted that these findings are still important to the study. Students were invited to

participate based upon gains of over 100 points—more than one grade level. These students were best able to speak to how the academy added to their impressive achievement. Additionally, the amount of increase still varied substantially. As noted in the case of the student above who gained 376 points, his achievement is attributed to being in a “caring group” with “teachers who know I need help.” He says “I was a good reader and writer in Spanish, but sometimes I don’t turn in stuff. But now, this year, I remember and then turn it in. [JA Academy] helped me with math and in [ELA]. The case challenges I had to read and understand the problem; it helped me write. And in math, it helped me doing like, putting the math in real world problems.”

Implications/Next Steps

The non-profit who began this academy model has already started growing by adding schools across the country each year (currently in two states in the Southeast). In the metro area, where Westside is located, there are currently 10 high schools using this academy model and at least a few more are under consideration for next year. In the 2019-2020 school year, they also branched out into two additional states. They have rolled out their model and business partners nation-wide. Teachers can replicate this success by using their model or by creating their own PBL based academy. This could be done with administrative and teacher buy in, and where students solve problems across content areas. Teachers/schools could partner with school, business, or community leaders to create real-world authentic problems for students to solve. These programs could create an atmosphere where discovery and innovation are rewarded. Teachers could use an authentic audience for presentations (other classes, school administration, local leaders, Skype, blog, etc.).

Another way teachers could use this model in their classroom is to look for local or national challenges for students to solve. They could create challenges or problems that relate to their content area. Teachers could work in cross-curricular teams to create challenges/problems students can work on in more than one class. Student choice is another key element of a PBL classroom. Teachers are encouraged to start small and consider revising a current project instead of trying to mimic an academy PBL model. A great website for resources is the Buck Institute (www.pblworks.org).

For teachers who are always trying to do new, innovative, research proven methods to reach all students and help them

excel, this academy model provides a framework for doing just that. Students repeatedly told the researchers how much they like the cross-curricular lessons and that the caring and involvement of their teachers made an impact on their own self-efficacy.

Instilling confidence and pride in students, especially a historically marginalized population of students, is one of the most important things researchers and educators can accomplish. As one student noted “It was fun working with people and presenting actually, being able to think things through. It was a good place for me to be. I’m a loud person, and I just like to work on certain things, you know what I mean? And we won the PWC case challenge! I was below basic in both reading and writing last year. In middle school. And this year? This year has been the most successful year I’ve had so far.”

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Appendix A	
<i>Sample lesson plan</i>	
Subject:	9th Lit
Core Competencies:	Critical and Analytical Thinking
Case Challenge Theme:	Making Effective Decisions
Standard(s):	<p>ELAGSE9-10W1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.</p> <p>a. Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.</p> <p>b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level and concerns.</p> <p>c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s).</p> <p>ELAGSE9-10W6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.</p> <p>ELAGSE9-10SL1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions(one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p> <p>a. a. Come to discussions prepared having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.</p> <p>b. b. Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.</p> <p>c. ELAGSE9-10SL4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.</p> <p>d. ELAGSE9-10SL5: Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.</p> <p>e. ELAGSE9-10SL6: Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.</p>
Objective(s):	Students will determine what type of insurance they could sell Romeo/Juliet and their families.
Case Challenge:	(left blank for anonymity)
Case Challenge Question:	To whom should _____ market its _____connected device- car dealerships or car owners?

Appendix A (con't) <i>Sample lesson plan</i>	
Activity 1:	Opening: Chalk Talk- reasons different people could need/want insurance Work Session: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In groups, create a list of types/reasons for insurance in R & J's day- how would it differ from today? 2. Pick one type that you think would be most helpful for R & J or their family. Create a decision tree to support your decision.
Activity 2:	Opening (Day 2 or maybe same day): Go over ethos, pathos, and logos- use commercials to practice id Work Session: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use rhetoric to create a 30 sec pitch for your insurance to R/J/Family- must use at least one type of rhetoric. 2. Use flip grid to record your pitch 3. Watch and vote on most convincing argument
Closing:	Write a paragraph detailing why you chose the type of insurance and the target audience and how you used the decision tree to help you. How did you use rhetoric in your pitch? Do you believe it would have been effective in convincing your target audience to buy your insurance? How can you relate this activity to your current case challenge? How does it connect?
Additional Connection	When we write the R & J persuasive essay- Who is to blame? Students will have to create a decision tree outlining their reasons why they chose that character.