

The Practice Project

A five-day curriculum outline for secondary teachers or advisers

ESSENTIAL QUESTION: *What does it take to get really good at something?*

DAY 1

Individually or in twos or threes, students talk or write about their own experiences with getting good at something. *Examples:* basketball, running, cheerleading, cooking, hairstyling, sewing, singing, acting, playing an instrument, stepping, drawing, slam poetry, speaking another language, building things, fixing things, and so on.

Prompts for student reflection:

- Think of something hard that you are good at doing.
- How did you first learn to do it?
- What was hardest when you first started doing it?
- What made you keep doing it even though it was hard?
- What helped you get better at it?
- Did anyone else help you with it? How?
- Describe one time when you knew you were getting better at it. How did you know?
- Once you started to get good at it, what made you want to get even better?
- Who do you trust to tell you how you're really doing? How do you know they will tell you the truth?

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DAY 2

1. Students share their reflections with the larger group.

- What was similar about your experiences of “getting good” at something?
- What was different about your experiences?
- Do you think everybody has a longing to be really good at *something*? Why or why not?

2. Students brainstorm areas in which adults out in the world get recognition because they know and/or can do something really well. *Examples: doctors, plumbers, lawyers, media producers, police detectives, chefs, teachers, reporters, artists, auto mechanics, computer whizzes . . .*

- Do you think there is a difference between adults getting really good at what they do and *your own* experiences getting really good at something?
- Are there similarities?

3. Let’s define an “expert” as someone that people ask for help with a serious problem — something too complex to solve without specialized knowledge and experience.

- In your community, make a list of the adults you know who qualify as experts.

Name _____ Field _____

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- Choose one of these adults and arrange to interview him or her, in person.

Name _____

Contact information _____

DAY 3

Conduct an interview with the expert you chose. Take a voice recorder so you can record the interview—if you cannot borrow a recorder, write down lots of notes. If you can bring along a camera, take photographs of the expert (at work, if possible).

Use these interview questions as a starter, then add whatever other questions you have:

- How did you first learn to do what you do?
- What was hardest when you first started doing it?
- What made you keep doing it even though it was hard?
- What helped you get better at it?
- Did anyone else help you with it? How?
- Describe one time that you knew you were getting better at it. How did you know?
- Once you started to get good at it, what made you want to get even better?
- How long did it take before people started coming to you as an “expert”?
- Who do you trust to tell you how you’re really doing? How do you know they will tell you the truth?

Write down any other questions you might want to ask:

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Write down any other questions you might want to ask:

DAY 4

Transcribe (or listen again to) the recording of your interview with the expert. (If you couldn't record it, look over your written notes.) Then use the worksheet on the next page to analyze what you learned. (If you have more to say than fits here, continue writing in the space below or on additional sheets of paper.)

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| NAME OF THE EXPERT | AREA OF EXPERTISE |
|---|-------------------|
| What (or who) got this person interested in this activity? | |
| What has this person found difficult (at any time) about the activity? | |
| What did the person do, to overcome that difficulty and continue getting better? | |
| Who coached the person in how to improve? (teacher, employer, relative, friend, teammate, partner, other...?) | |
| What kept the person going even when the activity got harder? | |
| How long did it take before people considered this person an expert? | |
| In what ways does this person's experience remind you of something you are learning to do? | |

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WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO GET REALLY GOOD AT SOMETHING?

A Report by _____

[Name of your group here]_____

To find out more about the process of developing expertise, this is what our group did:

- We interviewed _____ experts in _____ different fields. Among those fields were: [*Insert list of what your experts did*]
- We analyzed the interviews and came to the following conclusions:

Conclusion 1. _____

Our evidence for Conclusion 1 included the following statements by our experts: [*Insert interview quotes that support your Conclusion 1.*]

Conclusion 2. _____

Our evidence for Conclusion 2 included the following statements by our experts: [*Insert interview quotes that support your Conclusion 2.*]

Conclusion 3. _____

Our evidence for Conclusion #3 included the following statements by our experts: [*Insert interview quotes that support your Conclusion 3.*]

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