

Engaging Teenagers in Projects about Critical Conflicts of Their Time and Community: Leveraging my Exposure to OCDE Project GLAD®

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Middle school students are known for their challenging behavior. Most of the time, altered levels of hormones and overwhelming physical and emotional changes are to blame. In addition, they are required to be seated and quiet in class for extended periods of time, engage in rigorous content/material, and follow many rules. For their teachers, making class engaging is a tough challenge. My school is in one of Washington, DC's busiest neighborhoods. Columbia Heights' population represents a variety of cultures with a rich community. This is also true of my school. So, after teaching Bilingual Language Arts to 7th graders for four years, I finally felt confident implementing varied strategies through a structured routine.

I was introduced to OCDE Project GLAD® in my fifth year. Honestly, I was skeptical at first. As a teacher, it is frustrating to attend professional development that does not apply to my content and/or grade level. I was biased by a series of PDs that were of little use to my context. So, when I learned that I was to be trained in Project GLAD® I did not welcome the news. I learned, however, that the way the training was facilitated really helped to open my mind to a more efficient way of designing my projects and lessons. On top of making them more interesting, they were more rigorous and real-world aligned for my 7th graders.

Implementing Project GLAD® Strategies

Many of the GLAD® strategies I implemented, including variations on the Zero Noise Signal, helped me manage the class. Simple things like establishing community codes for silent time have made a huge difference in my students' academic and personal growth. I have found that students thrive if they interact with a class structure that offers them a sense of community and belonging. As a result, I have witnessed students change their

attitudes about education, teachers, and school.

In my Bilingual Language Arts 7 classroom, there were two content teachers, including me, and a Special Education teacher who pushed in every other day. We used a parallel co-teaching model: my colleague's role was to deliver most of his instruction in English, while I focused on Spanish. We utilized translanguaging to build a sense of relevance and allow the students to use their native language while learning their second. Both my co-teacher and our Special Ed colleague are Spanish language learners. Their

willingness to take risks and make mistakes destigmatized our students' shame in their own learning. Our use of both languages motivated the

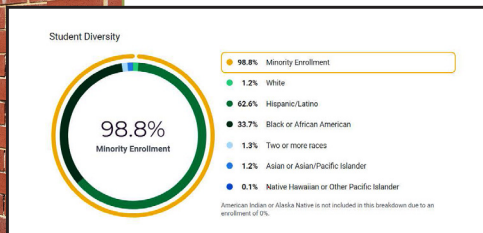
students to do the same. We modeled how adults utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to better their understanding and learn new things. Our class ran for 70 minutes, Monday through Friday. While the language focus changed every other day, students interacted with materials in their native language but reported out and wrote in the target language.

From the GLAD® training, I learned the importance of setting clear expectations from the beginning and was able to see the benefits it brought to everyone in my class. Imagine it is the middle of a lesson during which you expect some student interaction, and someone raises their hand. Best feeling ever when it is in reference to the topic of discussion, but then it turns out to be a request to use the restroom. Ugh! I tend to lose my train of thought with this kind of disruption. My students felt motivated to use different signals, in part because I shared my struggle with ADHD. First, they empathized with me because I experience what they sometimes experience. Secondly, they appreciated knowing that some rules make things easier for others. They began to understand that everyone has the right to get the

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Columbia Heights Educational Campus serves 1477 students in Grades 6-12.



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accommodation they need to be successful in our class. Here is an example of some of the signals that my 7th graders and I have used:

- ◇ Raised Hand Fingers Crossed: Restroom or water break
- ◇ Raised Hand Index Finger Up: Need 1:1 with teacher
- ◇ Raised Hand Open Palm: Question or comment about the lesson

Another way I leveraged what I learned from Project GLAD® was increasing the rigor of the topics we discussed

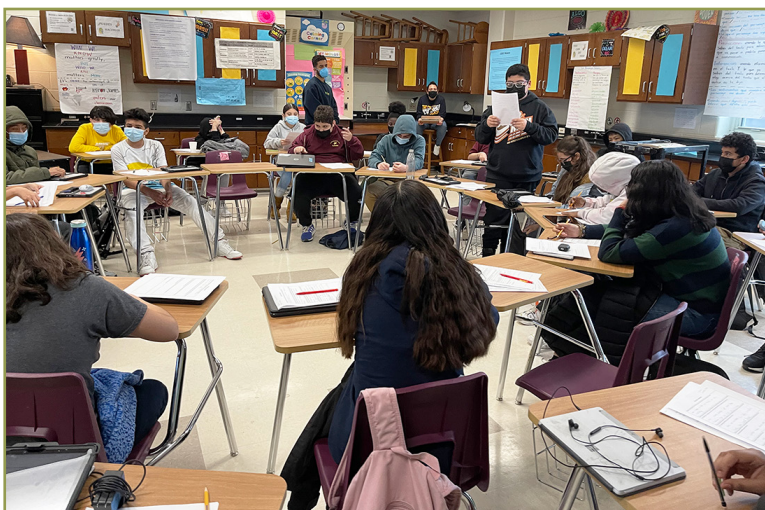
in our Socratic Seminars. This came to mind because of a conversation my students and I had one day after class. They were recounting the events that took place during a shooting they had witnessed the day before, right after school. They were all so into the conversation and had very strong opinions about the lack of safety in the area

surrounding the school. The shooting happened at the Metro stop across from school. Several of my students were there, saw when it happened, and ran, scared for their lives. A student said that the problem was that the police weren't controlling criminal activities and hadn't increased their presence in school areas during entry and dismissal time. I asked if they would like to reach out to stakeholders and raise their concerns and fears. They replied that no one cared about what they had to say. I reminded them that we live in the capital of the U.S. and asked them if they would like to learn how to make those in charge care by sharing their first-hand accounts in a respectful and educated way. They immediately got excited; that is how our Gun Violence Socratic Seminar two-week project came to be.

Socratic Seminars with live audiences and large numbers of students.

When we decided we would be doing a project about gun violence in our neighborhood, we knew that there were many skills the students would

need to learn in order to have a meaningful final product. We started by learning how to research and identify trustworthy sources. They learned how this level of preparation deepens the validity of their claims. From there, I started surveying my students to identify topics they wanted to learn about in class—which affected them and their community. To do so, I incorporated the GLAD® strategy of the Interactive Journal, where I asked my students to write a journal entry about the emotions, sensations, thoughts, fears, and ideas that came to their minds in relation to the rise of gun violence in our school's neighborhood.



Seventh-grade students participate in a Socratic Seminar on gun violence.

This Social Emotional Learning (SEL) focus made it meaningful because many of my kids felt comfortable being vulnerable about a topic that directly affected everyone in the room. They had a lot to say about this, all they needed was someone who would listen and help them express their concerns and wonderings.

Next, my students

collaborated in writing five guiding questions they could use during the Socratic Seminar. The expectation was that all students would participate at least two times and they would strive to fill in any awkward silence with follow-up questions and/or comments. We practiced a couple of times. For the big day, we invited other classes to join us and merged two of my sections to make the group bigger and keep the conversation going. I used to be reluctant to use such demanding and scholarly activities because my kids would not take it seriously. But then I realized the issue was not the activity, but their interest in the topic of study. Our school's librarian got us in touch with our councilmember, Brianne Nadeau. My co-teachers, our librarian, and I guided our 7th graders through their research projects in preparation for a Socratic Seminar where councilmember Nadeau would be an observer and address the students at the end of the seminar. Several teachers came to observe the discussion, and my students made me so proud about how well based in evidence and

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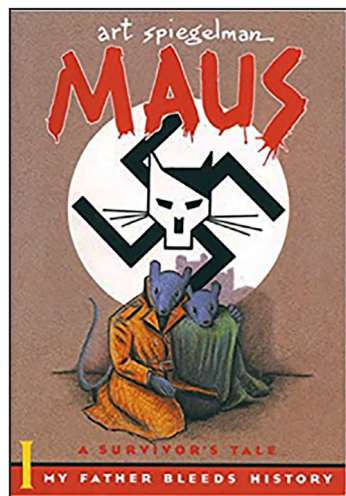
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facts their demands for social justice and safety at school and their surroundings were. They were so passionate and engaged in the discussion because they were able to influence someone who could make a change. Some of the comments made by the students afterwards were related to how being well prepared to support their opinions with facts really made a difference.

War between Ukraine and Russia - Connection to WWII (MAUS)

For our next project, we moved on to the study of a historical narrative about a Holocaust survivor. This project started as a way to engage students with critical content by way of an interesting source format, the graphic novel. To do so, we read the difficult stories in *MAUS: A Survivor's Tale* by Art Spiegelman. To begin, we used the GLAD® strategy of Inquiry Chart. Through this chart, students read the synopsis at the back of the book and shared what was new to them, what they already knew about WWII, and what they still wondered about.

We also used Observation Charts to allow students to make predictions and identify key details from black and white drawings of trains filled with Jewish prisoners being transported to



The graphic novel, MAUS by Art Spiegelman offered a unique format with which to study an historical narrative.

Auschwitz, German propaganda to join the war, and a poem about the horrors of the Holocaust. My students used those images to identify connections to the theme or central idea. In the accompanying student samples, you can see the different ways in which I used Inquiry Charts to have students access their prior knowledge and respond to the images. This exercise helped me identify both misunderstanding my students had about theme identification and areas for further language study. After this, we read the book *MAUS*, which became relevant because of the Russian invasion in Ukraine. They were reading words that they heard on the news but didn't really understand. The final product was to write their own graphic novel, in which they

would portray a social issue through the eyes of a fictional or real character. In order to prepare for that, I created a Pictorial Input Chart template in which the students could identify character traits from the book to develop the main character of their own graphic novel. The analysis would promote a full understanding of the ways in which the character traits influenced the plot of the story.

GLAD® strategies helped me make my lessons more relevant to my students' lives and design projects that were engaging and meaningful to this challenging group of students. I am proud to say that GLAD® helped me make my class one in which my students were able to actively and meaningfully participate. That to me was beyond powerful.

Fuente 3: Pintura sobre el Holocausto

LECTURA DETALLADA P1	LECTURA DETALLADA P2
<p>1. ¿Que observas? muchas gentes en un storage room o algo haci</p> <p>2. ¿Quiénes son las personas en esta imagen? judios</p> <p>3. ¿Que están haciendo estas personas? secuestrando a los judios</p> <p>4. ¿Que detalles sugieren lo que hacen las personas? ellos van a hacer una guerra en nombre de ellos</p>	<p>5. ¿Cuál es el estado de ánimo general de esta propaganda? furia, decepshion, tristeza</p> <p>6. Describe un detalle que apoya el estado de animo. es furia porque estan siendo loqueados en un cuarto</p> <p>7. ¿Cual es el mensaje del autor? que todo se puede hacer</p>

1. **Tarea Culminante:** En tus propias palabras ¿Que es el holocausto y cual era el propósito de los Alemanes con su ejecución?
el holocausto es un periodo en la guerra mundial 2 adonde un grupo llamado los nazi's

Written responses to Observation Chart questions provided useful data regarding student's content understanding and language needs.

Pictorial Input Chart

Instrucciones: Estas imágenes representan al personaje principal del texto MAUS por Art Spiegelman. Observa las imágenes. Después de leer el capítulo del texto de hoy, vamos a describir las características y cambios importantes por los que pasa el personaje a causa de conflictos y eventos en la historia.



¿Cómo se llama este personaje? El nombre de este personaje es ... Vladick Spiegelman

T1 - Rasgos del personaje (personalidad)

1. Detalle

2. Detalle

3. Detalle

Pienso esto sobre el personaje porque en la página número ... el texto dice "..." y esto quiere decir que el personaje

T2 - Intereses del personaje

1. Detalle

2. Detalle

3. Detalle

Yo sé esto sobre el personaje porque en la página número ... el texto dice que "... lo cual significa que el personaje ...

T3 - Conflictos que causan un cambio en el personaje

1. Detalle

2. Detalle

3. Detalle

Lo sé porque en la página número ... el texto menciona que "... y lo que esto representa para el personaje es/era ...

T4 - Formas en las que ha cambiado el personaje

1. Detalle

2. Detalle

3. Detalle

En la página número ... el texto muestra que "... y esto quiere decir que el personaje ahora es ...

This teacher-developed Pictorial Input Chart template helped students identify character traits for their own graphic novel.