

## **Project Title**

Empowering Student Self-Exploration Through PLPs

## **Abstract**

This project is to design and execute a unit embedding an exploration of personal and social identities through literature, self-reflection, and analysis of social influencers that will be paired with our Past, Present, & Future Me project and other identity-based PLP work.

## **Introduction & Rationale**

Our school has been experimenting with PLP structures at the middle level for several years, with very little success. The biggest struggle has undoubtedly been a lack of student engagement, though teacher engagement has been sparse as well. The reason for this lack of investment stems from the fact that PLPs, as they have been implemented in the past at our school, have lacked relevance and meaning. Our students did not understand how the PLP benefited them as a learner or as an individual. Therefore, they saw no purpose in the process. Our teachers have seen PLPs as just another added responsibility that would provide us with very little about our students' lives, interests, needs, aspirations, or any other pertinent information that will help us adjust our practice to better serve them.

In order to improve our efforts, it was our goal to spend our week at Middle Grades Institute designing a process that will make PLPs more meaningful, relevant, and useful for both students and teachers. Based on the testimonials of teachers at schools where PLPs are working, and research that we conducted through the Tarrant Institute's blog posts and resources within the MGI modules, we decided that the best course of action was to focus on the Identity portion of the PLP. This will allow each student to explore who they are as a person, as well as who they are as learners, and provide teachers with the benefit of getting to know their students on a deeper, more personal level. In order to avoid the impression that this process is an "add-on" for

teachers or students, we plan to weave the unit into our Humanities curriculum and connect it to an exploration of character traits and identity markers in literature. We hope that this manner of execution will make the entire process more authentic and meaningful for everyone.

### **Literature Review**

The research and resources used as we designed our project can be broken into two stages. The first stage was designing the identity exploration process, and many of the resources we used came from the [“Fostering Student Identity”](#) and [“Relationships and Belonging”](#) modules, as well as the TIIE blog posts entitled [“Diverse Books for Conversations About Identity,”](#) [“Equity, Identity, & Art,”](#) and [“Deeper Identity Work through PLPs.”](#) Additionally, the final project we designed for our students to do as part of their PLP was inspired by [the work of Marley Evans and Allan Miller](#) at Charlotte Central School.

The second stage of our work was to embed the equity literacy framework and bias prevention into what we had already created to ensure that our students had the tools to constructively discuss, respond to, and hopefully assist in redressing inequities and biases in their classrooms, school, and community. As we started embedding this learning into the activities and instruction we had already sketched out previously, Rebecca Haslam’s resources were incredibly valuable. We specifically plan to use the [Calling In/Out protocol](#) she shared so that students will have a clear and specific process to use when responding to bias, as well as the [Power of Language](#) resource that we and our fellow educators can use to help us acknowledge and change any biases that exist in our classrooms due to our own behaviors. We also dove into two blog posts from TIIE that directly connect to equity issues in education ([“Systemic Equity”](#) and [“Equity and Identity”](#)), each of which provided us with additional considerations to keep in mind as we execute this unit that we have created in the Fall.

## **Project Description & Implementation Plan**

Our work will be implemented in several stages:

1. Introduce character traits and examine which ones we value in ourselves and in each other.
2. Use picture books from our OCSU social justice library to introduce identity markers and learn about the process of having courageous conversations, including how to “call in” and “call out” each other in the interest of ending bias in our classrooms and communities.
3. Students use their learning about identity markers to do a self-examination of the components that make up their identities.
4. Start examining character traits and identity markers in literature, first through an identity audit of the authors of the novels we will be reading in book clubs (as well as those who appear on the NYT Bestseller List from a variety of years), and then through an identity analysis of the main character from each book club novel.
5. Introduce the concept of social influencers and ask students to analyze who the social influencers are for each of their book club main characters, as well as how those influencers impact the identity of the main character.
6. Students do a second self-examination, this time including who their social influencers are and how those individuals/groups have impacted the development of their identities up to this point in their lives.
7. Create a visual representation of their past, present, and future identities called “Who I Was, Who I Am, and Who I Want to Be.”

For a more detailed look at how our project will be executed, please see [this website](#) that we created to outline the unit for our colleagues. It provides a page that explains the purpose and context for our work, a page for each stage of the unit (including the activities and resources we plan to use), and a page for the project that will serve as the culminating event of the unit.

## **Data Collection**

Our work will include collection of several types of data. The first will be testimonials from students in the form of pre and post surveys about their feelings toward the PLP process. This will allow us to see if their impressions of the process are more positive after this reinvention than they were in the past.

We will also be collecting anecdotal notes about our observations throughout the execution of this unit. Our notes will address a variety of aspects of the process, but predominantly they will focus on our observations regarding students' levels of engagement and general attitudes toward the work.

Certainly the work that is produced throughout the unit will provide insight about how well we achieved our goal, but most notably students' final projects will be incredibly helpful in determining how well students were able to examine themselves. They will have an opportunity to share these projects at a showcase night where parents and other family members will be invited to our school. We will solicit feedback from parents at that event to get their perspectives on this work as well.