

ASKING “WHY?” MATTERS: THE CASE OF A HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS TEACHER

Erica Hamilton

Grand Valley State University

Shawn Jacob

Zeeland East High School

Abstract This case study is centered on a second career high school English Language Arts teacher who challenges his students to ask and answer “Why?” in conjunction with the content they learn. Drawing on Sinek’s (2009) “Golden Circle” model, originally intended for leadership training, this teacher utilizes Sinek’s model to frame instruction and support student learning. Findings indicate that this teacher’s use of Sinek’s model further supported and extended students’ learning and development. To support findings, examples and student responses as well as ideas/suggestions for applying Sinek’s model in other content areas is also discussed.

Keywords: teacher leadership, leadership, emotional intelligence, vision, strategy, teacher action research

Introduction

“When will I ever use the Pythagorean theorem in real life?” This was a question Shawn Jacob, now a high school English teacher, frequently asked his math teachers during his high school days. To hear him tell the story of his school experiences, he often had difficulty buying in to many of the content and ideas foisted upon him by adults—especially by some of his teachers. He was an inquisitive student insistently asking, “Why? *Why?* WHY?”

The Challenge

Using “The Real World” to Inform Instruction. The goal of K-12 teachers and educational institutions is to instill lifelong learning and to prepare students for their future college and

career goals, but it's not always clear what life will look like or what skills and knowledge they will need to be successful now and in their futures. According to a report published by the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), by the time these students are in their mid-twenties, they will have held an average of six jobs. Findings from a recent Gallup poll (2013) also revealed that one of the primary indicators of students' work quality beyond school was influenced by the number of opportunities they had to connect their learning to the real world. Connecting one's learning to the real world enables students to utilize and apply creativity as well as to develop perseverance, conscientiousness, and optimism—all important attributes of students who succeed (Tough, 2013).

We also know from research that humans are growth-oriented—humans *want* to learn and to do new things, which means humans must have multiple opportunities to learn, relearn, and connect their learning to the world in which they live. In doing so, they build on their strengths and expand their understanding. If they struggle or fail along the way, they learn to try again. This is something Dweck (2006) terms a “growth mindset,” which suggests that humans are able and should be challenged to learn and achieve more. However, part of this growth mindset means that in order to connect learning to the world in which they live, learners must have multiple opportunities to ask and answer the question, “Why?” This powerful question allows students to explore ideas and content in ways that move beyond right and wrong answers on a quiz or test. This question pushes students to consider the world around them in different ways, and in doing so, engages them in learning that is purposeful, meaningful and real-world connected.

Likewise, the heightened level of learners' engagement when they have opportunities to ask—and answer—“Why?” enables teachers to challenge their students with immersive, real-world assignments and projects that foster creative problem solving. In fact, 99% of Fortune 1000 CEOs ranked problem solving as “very important” or “absolutely essential,” (Markow & Pieters, 2011) and the authors of the Partnership for 21st Century Learning (P21) Framework (2015) contend that success in work and life requires more than just mastery of content area knowledge. P21 emphasizes creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration as essential 21st century “learning and innovation skills” which prepare students for “increasingly complex life and work environments.” Therefore, guiding students to purposefully ask “Why?”—providing them with experiences to find answers to this question, and ultimately equipping them to create their own learning experiences to answer “Why?”—not only fosters a more engaging classroom experience, but more importantly, develops the kind of creative problem solving necessary for students' success in and beyond school.

Research Question

A Focus on Asking “Why?” A self-described “lifelong learner,” second author Shawn Jacob is an energetic and passionate second career English Language Arts (ELA) teacher at Zeeland East High School, located in the suburban Zeeland Public Schools district in Zeeland,

Michigan. After successfully owning and managing his own independent music store and being self-employed as a professional magician—a career which allowed him opportunities to travel and perform throughout the Midwest for twelve years—Shawn went back to college to become a teacher, joining Zeeland East High School’s English Department where Erica was an eight-year veteran teacher. As colleagues, Erica and Shawn worked together to design and implement ELA curriculum to support student learning and growth, and they collaborated to design assessments aimed at connecting student learning to the real world. Although first author, Erica Hamilton left Zeeland Public Schools to pursue her doctorate, she and Shawn have continued to collaborate on various projects. She is now a researcher and teacher educator at a local university whose work focuses on supporting preservice and inservice teachers’ abilities to support and extend student learning. During the fall of 2014, Erica invited Shawn to collaborate on a semester-long, collaborative teacher action research project which took place during the Spring 2015 semester (January 2015 – June 2015). The project focused on the question, *When an English Language Arts (ELA) teacher creates opportunities for students to ask and answer the question, “Why?”, how might these opportunities extend students’ learning and connections to the real world?*

Study Design and Data

Answering the Question. This teacher action project utilized a collaborative approach, in which Erica utilized her knowledge of Zeeland East High School and Shawn to design this qualitative, case-based study (Yin, 2009). Throughout the data collection process, Erica remained in the role of researcher. During the study design and data collection phases of this project, Shawn functioned primarily as the case study participant. Data collected for this study included multiple classroom observations of Shawn conducted by Erica as well as three semi-structured interviews (45-60 minutes each) at various points in the semester, in which Erica interviewed Shawn. These interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for further analysis, with the express purpose of gaining additional insight into Shawn’s experiences, ideas, and understanding related to this study’s research question (Glesne, 2011). Shawn also contributed additional data, including course syllabi and website materials, examples of student work, student feedback and self- assessments, as well as other curricular materials related to this project’s research question. During the process of data analysis and the dissemination of this study’s findings, First and Shawn collaborated to discuss and analyze the data, including the identification of themes and a generation of responses to the research question.

Findings

A Profile: Shawn. Since he started teaching 11 years ago, Shawn has taught Journalism, Creative Writing, Mythology, and Yearbook, as well as all Zeeland East High School’s required ELA courses, grades 9-12. For the past two years, Shawn has taught American Literature, a yearlong required class for junior level students. His Common Core State Standards (CCSS) aligned curriculum includes fiction, non-fiction, research, and poetry, as well as the following required texts: *Our Town*, *The Great Gatsby*, *A Raisin in the Sun*, *To Kill*

A Mockingbird, and *The Crucible*. Throughout the school year, his students also complete various department-mandated common assessments related to literature, grammar, and writing.

A firm believer in applying Dweck's (2006) growth mindset to teaching and learning, Shawn repeatedly reminds his students that their brains and talents are important for the work and learning they do in his class. Shawn's passion for helping students make meaningful connections centers on pushing his students to ask and answer "Why?" to help them gain real world skills and connections necessary for success beyond school. Furthermore, as a second career teacher, Shawn uses what he's learned in his "real world" jobs to teach high school students how to engage and connect their learning to the world in which they live (Freire & Macedo, 1987). Specifically, he guides their learning by pushing them to ask and answer "Why?" In Shawn's classroom, it is not uncommon to hear discussions centered around such questions as "Why did this happen?"; "Why are we learning this?"; and "Why does this matter?" Shawn knows that students need to learn to acknowledge and, perhaps, embrace complexity, wrestle with dualities and contradictions, engage with others around important ideas and topics, and be willing to change their minds. Challenging them to ask "Why?" fosters all of these.

A Focus Asking "Why?" The logical, rational stuff of the *what* and the *how* may not support students' learning as effectively if teachers don't first offer up some answers to the all-important question of "Why?" Frontloading meaningful answers to students' relentless demands for answers to *why* in any content area and at all grade levels is essential, particularly at the secondary level. The pairing of a teacher's contagious enthusiasm, along with meaningful explanations of why the topic or unit of exploration is of value, more often leads students to buy in to *what* is being taught. When students learn to ask "Why?", they take this skill with them into their lives and careers. Asking and answering "Why?" helps students generate a clearer understanding of, and a vision for the world, themselves, and their future (Freire, 1998).

Based on his book, *Start With Why* and content presented in his TED Talk, "How Great Leaders Inspire Action," Sinek (2009a; 2009b) argues for the use of "the golden circle," consisting of three concentric circles, with the innermost one containing the question "Why?"; the next one asking "How?"; and the outermost ring asking "What?" (Figure 1).

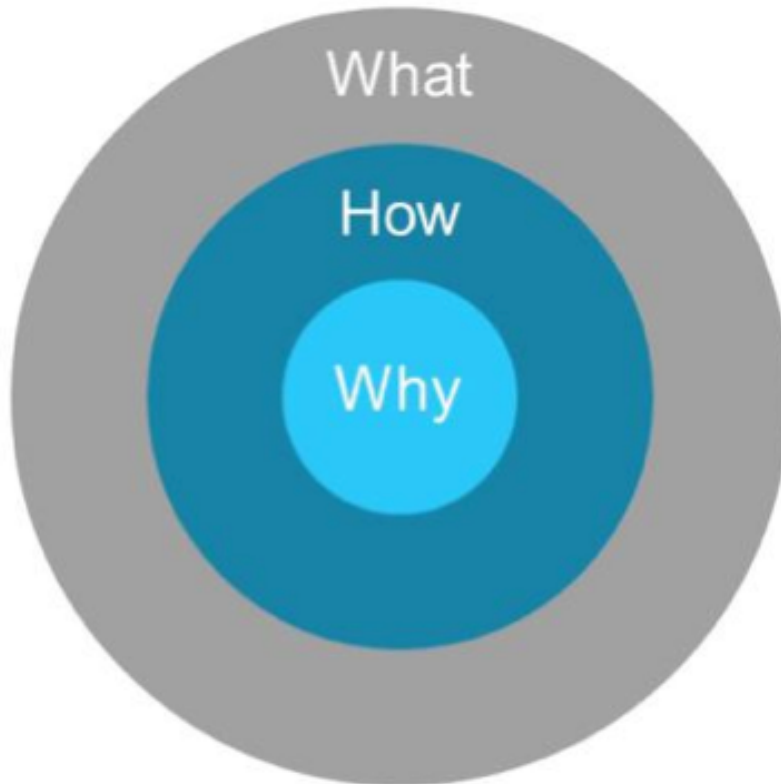


Figure 1. Simon Sinek's "Golden Circle"

Sinek espouses that less inspiring leaders address these questions from the outside in, answering the question of *what* they are selling, then *how* their idea or product is generated, and ending with *why* they do what they do. In contrast, Sinek asserts that those who inspire people to buy in to their ideas, messages, or products, start with answering "Why?" because this is a question everyone wants to ask and answer. Although Sinek's work is focused on business, his ideas can also help teachers prepare their students for life beyond school. By starting with "Why?" as Sinek (2009a) suggests, teachers focus their students on the larger purpose and meaning of what they will learn.

When Shawn learned about Sinek's (2009a; 2009b) "Golden Circle," he became much more explicit with, and purposeful in, helping his students ask and answer the essential question (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013) "Why?". In doing so, he realized that when students were provided with explicit opportunities *and* encouragement to ask "Why?"—as well as other related essential questions—in conjunction with the content and skills they learned, they had additional opportunities to push their learning beyond studying for a test or completing an end- of-the-unit project focused solely on students' retelling or comprehension of

content. This essential question of “Why?” guides students’ thinking and learning as they consider the broader questions of life in light of the content and skills they learn in school. When Shawn centered on this essential question, he saw how his students were extending and expanding their learning, making connections between their learning in his ELA classroom and the world in which they lived.

As with all texts he and his American Literature students study, Shawn wants his students to read and understand the stories in such a way that they can answer such essential questions (McTighe & Wiggins, 2013) as, “Why did we read this?”; “What does this piece have to do with what it means to be human?”; “Who am I, and how do I see the world?”; and “Does literature matter?”. Essential questions related to asking and answering some aspect of “Why?” are at the heart of every essential question (EQ) Shawn introduces at the onset of each unit, as well as questions he challenges his students to formulate for themselves. As a result, students enter every unit of study with purposeful reasons to search for meaningful answers. To support students’ metacognition, Shawn also pairs the essential questions with opportunities for students to self-reflect and self-assess their learning, considering and responding to questions such as, “What skills have I developed as a result of exploring this text?” and “What have I learned about myself as a student and human?”.

Making connections between learning in school and the larger world is an invaluable skill that serves students throughout their lifetimes (Harvey & Goudvis, 2007). These connections also offer students opportunities to understand that what they learn in school has relevance beyond school (Willingham, 2009). One example of Shawn’s use of Sinek’s (2009a; 2009b) “Golden Circle” occurred when his students studied the play, *Our Town*. Shawn began by establishing the historical context of author Thornton Wilder’s life and that of the script, as well as the characters and the setting. But by the end of the play, his desire wasn’t for his students to just know the plot and the characters so that they could pass an end-of-unit test. He wanted them to discover that it wasn’t just a story of people in a small town in America, and it wasn’t a play virtually devoid of all props and sets in which nothing significant seemed to happen. Instead, the play was a metaphor for *their* town and for *their* lives. As they read, acting it out in class and completing assignments along the way, he helped them understand that they were actually reading about “*our town* of Laketown, USA” (pseudonym).

With Shawn’s unit centered on the play, *Our Town*, the end-goal—the *what* of this unit—was for each student to carefully craft a personal narrative, in which they began to read themselves and the world using Wilder’s (2003) play as their springboard. The means of getting there—the *hows*—included acting out and analyzing the play in class; writing blog posts as a means of making text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world connections (Tovani, 2000); engaging in class discussions (Fisher, Frey, & Rothenberg, 2008); and exploring mentor texts, specifically models of others’ personal narratives (Gallagher, 2014). Shawn

used a number of strategies, activities and assignments to accomplish the *hows*. For example, he acted as the Stage Manager when students read and acted out various parts of the play. He not only functioned as the character who narrated within the play, but Shawn also narrated the nuances of the play, often challenging students to discuss Thornton Wilder's use of theatrical techniques, as well as to reflect aloud on their own connections to the characters and various plot points. Blog posts challenged students to write about their personal connections to the play and its thematic elements, building a collection of exploratory writings from which they later drew for the culminating assignment of crafting their own personal narrative. Students responded to the following essential question: "If you could relive a time in your past, what would you choose and why?" Later in the play, students resonated with the main character, Emily, who, in Act III, insists on re-experiencing one day from when she was still alive. She chooses the day of her twelfth birthday, only to discover that it wasn't quite how she'd remembered it. More importantly, she has an epiphany about how wonderful life was and how she had failed to appreciate the beauty of simple, everyday things. It's this central theme of the play that Shawn's students connected with through the writing of their own narrative, revisiting a time from their past that now, in hindsight, brings them new understanding of something they failed to notice at the time. In the end, students saw how the characters of Wilder's *Our Town* are, in fact, the people of *their town*. Shawn wrote alongside of his classes to model his writing process, and to share his investment in, and enthusiasm for, what he asked them to do. His willingness to take chances with his own writing and story telling, including inviting students to critique his own work each day, gave students opportunities to see how Shawn made meaning from each component of the unit *and* to see the importance of drafting and collaboration throughout the writing process.

This more contextualized and application-based approach to building meaning and real-world connections is accomplished through a variety of engaging activities, one of which entails Shawn's students making a time capsule of things that best represent Laketown, USA during that school year. Not only does this activity encourage peer collaboration, it also invites 16- and 17-year-olds to study their world, and it forces them to take a more critical look around them so that they actively wrestle with and begin to identify what defines who they are, what they believe, and why they value certain things, ideas, and people.

Discussion

How Do We Get High School Students to Ask and Answer, "Why?" When students are invited and expected to ask essential questions such as, "Why?"— which goes beyond the act of reading or writing particular texts in a content area—they begin

Journal of Teacher Action Research - Volume 3, Issue 1, 2016,
<practicalteacherresearch.com>, ISSN # 2332-2233 © JTAR. All Rights

THE JOURNAL OF TEACHER ACTION RESEARCH 13

to uncover the truth that their worldview is not the only one that exists in the world. Because the English Language Arts emphasizes and centers on reading, writing, viewing, performing, listening, and speaking (Kress, 1999) some may argue that ELA more readily lends itself to students asking and answering “Why?” However, this is not at all the case.

Across and within disciplines, teachers need to overtly and purposefully help their students ask and answer this important question. In addition to the *what*, teachers must be explicit about *why* students are expected to learn particular content and then invite them to consider their learning in light of the world in which they live. The facts, stories, and ideas students learn mean little without context and opportunities to apply their learning to the world in which they live. Based on our work together with this project, we offer six suggestions for helping students to ask and answer, “Why?” (see Figure 2).

Helping Students Ask and Answer “Why?”

1. Have students work individually and with partners to answer essential questions (EQs) at the beginning of a new unit. Throughout the unit, include stopping points in which students are challenged to reflect on how their answers have (or have not) changed and why. They can do this through informal class discussions, blog posts, symbolic artwork, song writing, journal reflections, anchor charts, or thinking/concept maps.
2. Provide students the standards that will be addressed in a new unit, then have them generate their own EQs. Keep them posted on the classroom walls, then, as answers reveal themselves, have students write and/or draw those answers next to the EQs. In so doing, students may visually monitor their own exploration of *why* the contents of this unit matter.
3. Challenge students to ask and answer, “Why is this important to learn?” Make exploring for meaningful answers to this question a part of daily discussion and written reflection throughout a unit.
4. Frontload students with anchor lessons, providing shared experiences for the class to refer back to as the unit unfolds. Perhaps have them interview someone in reference to one or more of the big ideas that will be explored during the unit (e.g., an expert in the field, a role model, family member, community member, or peer). Invite students to connect with those around them, which will further equip them to make connections; plus, this creates opportunities for students to engage with others to support their learning and thinking during this and future units.
5. Closely connected to Tip #4, challenge students to design an ongoing project throughout a unit enabling them to move beyond *knowing* the content to actually *doing* something with it in a way that impacts others beyond the classroom (Holm, 2011). For example, a social studies student could move beyond learning about the current Middle East refugee crisis to doing something to help by following such Twitter feeds as #refugeeswelcome and #trainofhope. Awareness raising and fundraising campaigns could then be developed and implemented by students as

they deepen their understanding of this contemporary socio-political/economic issue. Likewise, a math student could collaborate with that same social studies student to generate a cross-curricular element to this project, perhaps exploring the financial/mathematical factors connected to reasons why governments are turning refugees away.

6. As students explore “real world” themes throughout a lesson or unit, many answers to their “Why?” questions may be answered in meaningful and transformative ways. P21 recommends blending 21st century interdisciplinary themes into the curriculum (such as those listed below) to further support students’ ability to make connections between and across content areas.

Global awareness

Financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy

Civic literacy

Health literacy

Environmental literacy

Figure 2. Six suggestions for helping students ask and answer Why?”

During the second semester, Shawn’s American Literature students also engaged in an “Injustice Project,” in which they worked with one or two peers to select a modern injustice happening somewhere in the world (they choose from a list of topics or suggest one of their own). They then conduct research on that topic using a variety of resources (e.g., websites, videos, experts in the field, community members, etc.). As part of their work, they regularly dialogue with Shawn about their thinking and learning, and they generate written materials chronicling their work and ideas. To culminate their project, students create and present a 20 to 30-minute multimedia presentation in which they share with their peers why this topic is important, what has been (and is being) done about it, and how students today can address this issue. Throughout the process of this choice-driven (Pink, 2009), multi-week project, students practice and develop mastery of Common Core standards (2010), such as reading informational texts; writing informative/explanatory texts; and developing speaking and listening elements such as comprehension and collaboration, as well as presentation of knowledge and ideas.

Students’ Own Words: Reasons Asking “Why?” Matters. Shawn intentionally pushes students beyond the *how* and the *what* throughout the school year to focus in on the essential question of “Why?”. Evidence of the impact this has had on students may be found in students’ completion of the research-based, social issues-oriented Injustice Project, which took place during the second semester. Shawn watched his students start their own crusades to fight global and local injustices such as limited access to clean drinking water, human trafficking, and poverty.

It's this ongoing movement through the *hows* and the *whats* of each unit with a steady eye affixed on the essential questions, namely the *whys*, that encourages students to invest themselves in their work and their world. Without a focus on and commitment to exploring and answering the important "Why?" questions, students would be less likely to extend and connect their learning beyond the classroom. Focusing on "Why?" moves them beyond completing another assignment or project just for a grade or to pass the class, as was evident in the work students shared and the initiatives and causes they began to champion.

Centering on "Why?" matters because their answers and responses to these essential questions are bigger than themselves and the microcosm of their high school. They see and learn that there is a world well beyond theirs that needs action. This relationship between students asking "Why?", discovering their own answers, and being inspired to act in response to their new understanding was reaffirmed when Shawn interviewed some of his former students the following Fall (2015), after they'd completed the Injustice Project during the Spring semester of their junior year. Figure 3 provides some of their thoughts and responses regarding how asking "Why?" in connection to their experiences with the Injustice Project mattered personally and academically.

Shawn's Students Reflect on The Injustice Project and "Why?"

Does it matter whether you understand WHY your teacher is giving you an assignment?

Cora: Yes. If I don't understand the purpose, I won't have a world connection or a personal connection, which makes it harder to do an assignment to my full potential.

Ty: Definitely. This helps me see ways I can use what I learn in the real world.

Rodrigo: It absolutely matters! It gives me a sense of purpose for how it will come in handy in the future—or how it affects a high school student in Zeeland, Michigan.

Jackie: Knowing why one has to complete the objective, one [may] put more heart into it. Practice might be what makes perfect, but now the student knows what that practice is designed to build up to.

Ashlyn: When my teachers assign projects that actually have real-life application—like, if you taught me how to do my taxes, I'd pay attention—but when they give busy work that isn't applicable, and they don't really tell why we're doing it, we just do it to get it done. But with the "Injustice Project," we were all really invested in it because it altered how we view society. So it was really nice to know why we were doing what we were doing.

What made the Injustice Project different than ones you have done in other classes?

Cora: What made it different was we got to choose our injustice subject. As a result, I actually had motivation to do it, because I had an interest in the topic.

Ty: It was real world, and we had time to research and become experts on the topic we chose. I liked being able to connect things I was learning to the real world and to see how injustices I learned about in other classes actually still exist; they're not just in history books.

Rodrigo: We actually got to interact and see images, read stories, and see videos—we were our own teachers. We weren't told what to present or not to present; we got to choose what we believed were the most important facts, statistics, and aspects. I liked that we as the students got to be our peers' teachers. We educated them on a topic, answered questions, and people actually seemed engaged and wanted to participate.

Jackie: The project made students think outside their little, safe bubbles and realize just what is happening in the world.

Ashlyn: I've done research projects for years, but with this one, what we said really mattered, because our statements about the topic altered how our peers viewed society, so we had to get it right. I got so much more out of everyone else's presentations than when we just have generic topics. This was a project that helped us better understand the world we're living in and how it affects our perception of the past, the present, and the future.

How, if at all, did the process of doing the Injustice Project change you?

Cora: Because I knew I would be traveling to India last summer, researching the oppression of women in the Middle East meant more to me because I knew I might encounter that on my trip. It opened up my eyes to how good I have it here in America.

Ty: It made me more aware of injustices in society, but the topic I researched (caste systems) is so far away in the world that I felt like I couldn't do anything about it.

Rodrigo: I've done little things. I conserve as much water as possible now. I wrote to state senators and my local state representative about the issue of immigration. I read more about Obamacare, and when I hear someone saying something that's not true about it, I try to correct them. In general, I try to tell more people about these issues in an attempt to spread awareness.

Jackie: I realized that even though I now know about which companies exploit poor families and children, I still see myself buying their products. That really tells me something about myself and humans in general. As long as it is convenient, people will go after such items. We don't know those people, so their suffering is out of sight and out of mind. It's interesting but also sad to see something as simple as a chocolate bar be attached to child labor.

Ashlyn: It taught me to be so informed about my topic (i.e., women's rights) that I'm confident to talk about it with anyone. It impacted how I watch the news or how I look at politics now; it's given me a broader worldview.

Figure 3. Students' feedback on the Injustice Project and the essential question "Why?"

(NOTE: Students were interviewed separately in-person or via email, and their first names appear here with each student's permission.)

Though they are learning state-mandated skills, it is important to note that the guiding force that motivated many of Shawn's students at this point in the school year was no longer the grade or doing it because they were required to. Instead, they immersed themselves in the challenge because they *wanted* to find answers to the "Why?" questions connected to their self-selected topics, and along the way, they saw their world expand. The less engaging, institutional "hows" and "whats" took a backseat to the motivational, ubiquitous "Why?" which encouraged students to ask such questions as, "Why is this topic important?" and "Why should my peers and I care about it?" As Shawn's students moved toward mastery of course content skills, they became more informed, engaged, and empathetic members of our global society.

Concluding Remarks

Framed by the essential question of "Why?" and focused on supporting students' research skills—including accessing, reading, and evaluating resources, and synthesizing their learning for others—the Injustice Project went from being another thing to do for a grade, to being a moral imperative. Shawn's students summed it up best, repeatedly stating that this essential question gives them purpose for their learning. It inspires them to invest in a project, and it encourages them to invest in their learning, putting their heart into their work. Leading off any project with the challenge for students to formulate their own questions centered on "Why?" moves the work from being perceived as busywork their teacher is making them do, to—as students Rodrigo and Ashlyn put it—being "their own teachers" whose "statements about the topic altered how our peers viewed society, so we had to get it right."

So, does asking "Why?" extend students' learning and connection to the real world? Absolutely. Well before —and well beyond—one's school years, this is a question that propels humans to think and learn while connecting themselves to the world around them. Asking and answering the question "Why?" shifts students to the center of their learning and supports an autonomous pursuit of knowledge with the intended purpose of a collaborative, potentially transformational exploration of the world. When students are equipped to ask and answer "Why?" in secondary classrooms, they exercise agency, engage with ideas, consider the world in which they live, change their minds, and make connections between what they learn and *why* they're learning it.

About the Authors

Erica R. Hamilton is an assistant professor in the College of Education at Grand Valley State University in Grand Rapids, MI. Her research interests include preservice and inservice teacher learning, literacy, and educational technology. Committed to connecting research and practice, Erica's research and teaching focus is on working with teachers to support and extend student learning.

Shawn Jacob is an English Language Arts teacher at Zeeland East High School in Zeeland, MI. He consulted with Apple on the development of their popular iTunes U app; his award-winning iBook *Writing Tune-Ups: Jumpstart Your Writing with Adjectives and Opening Adjectives* has been a Top 5 course on Apple's iTunes U charts; but Shawn's greatest joy comes from daily interactions with inspiring students in his classroom.

References

- Dweck, C.S. (2006). *Mindset: The New psychology of success*. New York: Random House. English Language Arts Standards. (2015). Retrieved September 20, 2015, from <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/>
- Fisher, D., Frey, N., & Rothenberg, C. (2008). *Content-area conversations: How to plan discussion-based lessons for diverse language learners*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Gallagher, K. (2014). Making the most of mentor texts. *Educational Leadership*, 71(7), 28-33.
- Glesne, C. (2011). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction* (4th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Harvey, S., & Goudvis, A. (2007). *Strategies that work: Teaching comprehension for understanding and engagement* (Second ed.). Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.
- InSight: Rivier Academic Journal*, 7 Kress, G. (1999). Genre and the changing contexts for English Language Arts. *Language Arts*, 76(6), 461-469.
- Markow, D., & Pieters, A. (2011). *The MetLife survey of the American teacher: Preparing students for college and careers*, 149. Retrieved September 3, 2015, from https://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/contributions/foundation/american-teacher/MetLife_Teacher_Survey_2010.pdf New York: MetLife, Inc.
- National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers. (2010). *Common Core State Standards for English language arts and literacy in history/social studies, science, and technical subjects*. Washington, DC: Authors.
- Partnership for 21st Century Learning (2015). *Framework definitions*. Retrieved from http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/docs/P21_Framework_Definitions_New_Logo_2015.pdf
- Pink, D. (2009). *Drive: The surprising truth about what motivates us*. New York, NY: Riverhead Books. McTighe, J., & Wiggins, G. (2013). *Essential questions: Opening doors to student understanding*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Sinek, S. (2009a). *Start with why: How great leaders inspire everyone to take action*. New York: Penguin Group.
- Sinek, S. (2009b). "How great leaders inspire action." TED talk. Retrieved from https://www.ted.com/talks/simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action/transcript?language=en
- Tough, P. (2012). *How children succeed: Grit, curiosity, and the hidden power of character*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company.
- Holm, M. (2011). Project-based instruction: A review of the literature on effectiveness in prekindergarten through 12th grade classrooms [Electronic version]. (2), 1-13. Retrieved September 6, 2015, from http://bie.org/object/document/project_based_learning_a_review_of_the_literature_on_effectiveness
- Tovani, C. (2000). *I read it, but I don't get it: Comprehension strategies for adolescent readers*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.

Wilder, T. (2003). *Our town: A play in three acts*. New York: HarperCollins. Willingham, D. T. (2009). *Why don't students like school: A cognitive scientist answers questions about how the mind works and what it means for the classroom*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed. Vol. 5). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.