

Why Deeper Learning?

By Tara L. Isaacs & Maddie Shepard

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Jefferson County Public Schools in Louisville, Kentucky, has embarked on some of the most exciting work in its history. The best part? It's not just another packaged program. This work focuses instead on supporting and extending the great work teachers are already doing – work that creates learning experiences so exciting for students they can't wait to come back to school the next day. Work that is meaningful and relevant. Work they are thinking about long after the school day ends. Work they will tell stories about years later.

Some Context... For years, educators across Kentucky have poured resources and human capital into making a positive difference for students. Each individual teacher, for similar reasons, signed up to enter a traditionally underappreciated profession with moving targets only to be tasked with proving that they are doing their jobs correctly. Despite years of high stakes accountability aimed at closing achievement gaps, it seems we've made very little progress. A few schools have figured out how to beat the system with aggressive test prep. Others have been able to survive the testing scrutiny, though some of these efforts manifest in "achievement" on paper, *we know* neither of these are preparing students for a future we have never seen before.

This is Why... In December of 2015, JCPS began a quest to change the strategic Vision 2020 plan to one focused on Deeper Learning. Committees were formed, an *Innovation and Play Day* scheduled to allow teachers the opportunity to try something new and fail forward if needed. Trainings were offered for district staff and slowly the Deeper Learning concepts became the buzz of Twitter chats. As part of an in-depth and large scale exposure to even more schools, the board sponsored a three-day *Deeper Learning Symposium* comprised of both international, national, state and local educators. And, as you might guess, many teachers ran with their findings and have already begun to *sow the seeds* of even more Deeper Learning.

It's About Equity - *The foundation for Deeper Learning is equity.* Often, despite the best of intentions, students who need those experiences we might characterize as deeper learning the most are those least likely to get them. JCPS is now at a place of alignment in realizing we have to start doing things differently. If we are expecting different results that means change...lots of it.

It's about good teaching, but it's also about entering a place where focus only on academic content - and assessing only that content - is no longer the sole focus. In the words of famed JCPS theologian and scholar, Alan Young, "it's both, and more!" Sure, deeper learning is about content, but it is also about dispositions, capacities, and skills like collaborating, communicating and leading that we are also tasked with teaching.

It's about discovering who each learner is, and how they might learn best while exposing them to skills that stretch and build upon existing strengths encountered as a learner. Deeper Learning is about creating an environment where each student develops a strong sense of agency. This happens by giving students a voice – respecting them as learners and people, allowing them to make choices and decisions as a regular and intentional part of each day.

It's about personalizing the experiences of students, so that there are options for how subject matter is learned and applied including adjustments in time, depth and pace. Deeper learning is about solving real problems and sharing those solutions with authentic audiences.

It's about preparing for a life and career that relies less and less on rote memorization and more on critical thinking, problem-solving, working with others and communicating.

The [Hewlett Foundation](#) identifies six competencies that students need to be able to demonstrate well to prepare for a competitive global society. They are:

1. Master core academic content
2. Think critically and solve complex problems
3. Work collaboratively
4. Communicate effectively
5. Learn how to learn
6. Develop academic mindsets

Ultimately, Deeper Learning is about students *arriving at becoming themselves*. Within each of the *Caring, Thinking* and *Communicating* circles of JCPS' Deeper Learning Framework, there are learner capacities and dispositions (i.e. perseverance and empathy). Each student will need different supports and will bring unique skills and experiences to the table prior to identifying the learning...but the point is to reach students where they are and give them a reason for learning, a reason to try, a reason to have hope and a reason to care.

The fact is our world is rapidly changing and often, the school experience has not. In many cases, classrooms don't look much different than they did over a 100 years ago. This is a problem for graduates who face a world where artificial intelligence and driverless cars become more commonplace. We don't know what kinds of jobs the future holds for today's kindergarteners. What we do know, however, is that if they are equipped with the ability to think critically, to solve problems, to work with others and to communicate well, their chances of success are much greater.

For Jefferson County Public Schools, things are changing in a necessary and exciting way. Two words that have come to town and plan to stay are Deeper Learning. For the first time in the history of the district, there is a combination of leadership, alignment in vision/goals and a strong signal towards organizational coherence. This is BIG news!... and where Kentucky might take note. JCPS is blazing a trail for students!

As you begin your work with Deeper Learning, consider starting with a Graduate Profile. What do you want your students and/or own child to leave elementary school, middle school and high school knowing and being able to do?

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Resources:

<http://www.hewlett.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/DL-guide.pdf>

In the next issue...**Getting Started with a Graduate Profile**