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## CSL and the Harlem Renaissance

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## WHO ARE THE STUDENTS?

- The students in this round of CSL are my two classes of juniors, taking US History II.
- Most of the students in this class are high-energy, low-focus students who are convinced they cannot succeed in academic environments. Some, in contrast, are high achievers who need little to no guidance or prompting from any teacher. Many of them have exhibited a lack of awareness of racial- and gender-specific issues, and many also exhibit a lack of impulse-control.
- All of the students are included to at least some degree in this project, since they are all in the class together.



## WHAT IS THE PROJECT?

- Either solo or in small groups of 2-3, the students will choose an influential figure from the *Harlem Renaissance* and conduct independent research. They will create a project from multiple options describing what they learned about the Harlem Renaissance in general and their important person in particular.
- Some of these students have a lack of awareness in regards to racial and gender-related cultural issues, and this project was done in an effort to mitigate that lack of awareness without directly confronting it. In today's world, racism and sexism are generally *not* acceptable in most polite company.
- My students do *not* react well when directly confronted with their own biases, so this was an attempt to do so indirectly.

# CSL and the Harlem Renaissance

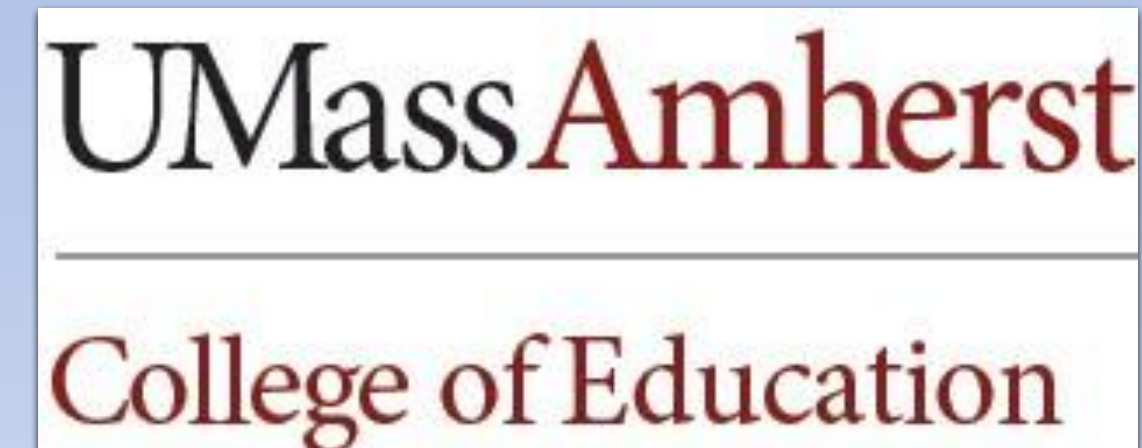
Kathleen Johnson

## THE PBL CYCLE

- *Challenging Problem or Question*: the students were investigating the influential cultural contributions of minorities during the Harlem Renaissance, discretely challenging their own biases.
- *Sustained Inquiry*: the students conducted research on their own for multiple days.
- *Authenticity*: many of my students have expressed an interest in music, and chose to focus on musicians from this era. Others enjoy art and chose to research artists.
- *Student Voice & Choice*: students could choose their own influential figure, and could decide whether to make a PowerPoint or create an alternate method of presenting their information.
- *Reflection*: as a class we conducted a 'sharing circle' at the end to discuss what we learned, why we learned it, and whether or not we enjoyed this process.
- *Critique & Revision*: students worked together on this project, sharing and commenting on each other's work and driving each other to succeed.
- *Public Product*: the students presented their slideshows to each other at the end of the unit.
- *The Next Step*: including more structured choices for students to inspire more interest in the topic.

## ACES

- The meeting times were mostly unaffected by the ACES/Poverty Considerations, as the meeting times were just class time. However, one student did miss a few days of work on this, as his father had just passed, which would emphatically be one of the ACES. He was given an extension on his project, and will not have to present it to the class.
- The overall project design was also mostly unaffected by the ACES/Poverty Considerations. It *did* require internet access, ideally via Chromebook, but the school provides Chromebooks to all students and the work was all in-class, thus obviating the need for outside internet access.



## LITERATURE

### IN SUPPORT OF STUDENT-DRIVEN RESEARCH:

- One book supports student-driven research as a way for everything a student has learned (from basic skills to advanced content and processes) to come together and allow the students to exhibit their knowledge and skills in a meaningful way. (Renzulli, *Engagement Clusters: a Practical Plan for Real-World, Student-Driven Learning*)
- Another article discusses 'active learning', another term for student-driven research, and how it helps to develop students' interests and skills (research skills, writing skills, time-management skills, etc.) (*Matter, Method, and Machine: The Synergy of World History, Active Learning, and Computer Technology*)

### CHALLENGES TO STUDENT-DRIVEN RESEARCH:

- One article talks about how students can create their own Personal Learning Environments (PLE) to share their active learning with others, increasing their confidence and putting them in the role of teacher and leader. (Facilitating Student-Driven Constructing of Learning Environments Using Web 2.0 Personal Learning Environments.)
- Another article discusses the challenges of student-driven research for ELLs, both children and adults; it also emphasizes the importance of encouraging ELLs to learn through student-driven research. (Ananyeva, Maria. "A Learning Curriculum: Toward Student-Driven Pedagogy in the Context of Adult English for Academic Purposes, English for Specific Purposes, and Workplace English Programs.)

## FINDINGS

Before now, I had not given the students nearly so much personal choice in their projects. Giving the students choice in both the subject of their project *and* the method of delivery was a big change; however, since *all* of them chose to do a PowerPoint presentation, there was a bit less variability than I had initially planned on. Offering the students structured choices (I provided them with a long list of names of influential figures from the Harlem Renaissance) was a success, and I will continue to offer structured choices like this as my teaching career continues.