

Elevating Student Voice Through Activism

By Patty Lambusta

In the Spring of 2020, like most schools across America, my school shut down and the faculty was left scrambling on how we would continue to teach in a virtual environment. There is nothing like a pandemic to make you rethink your role and your library. I knew that the library was more than a physical space, but I needed my administration and teachers to recognize this, as well.

That following summer, I took a hard look at my role as instructional partner, information specialist, and teacher. I knew that creating a guided inquiry unit would benefit students regardless of whether we were virtual, hybrid, or in person. During that same summer, Adria Merritt, our then K-12 Instructional Literacy Coach read the book, *Guided Inquiry Design in Action: Middle School*, which I had co-authored with Dr. Leslie Maniotes and LaDawna Harrington. She approached me about creating an English unit for one of our three grade levels. We decided on 8th grade and invited Jessica Wilson, 8th Grade English teacher, to collaborate with us. Thus, our journey began.

Although I would never want to be in a virtual teaching setting again, it did afford my team and me opportunities of time to focus on creating this unit. We knew that we had to ensure the lessons could be taught virtually or in-person because we were still in the beginning months of the pandemic. We also knew that we needed to start with a broad enough topic which would be engaging because we were already witnessing apathy in our students. As a learning team, we decided on the topic "Activism" knowing middle school students can get fired up about injustices they care about.

Using the Guided Inquiry Design framework, we developed a strong unit that emphasized many forms of activism ranging from environmental to educational inequities. As the information specialist, I provided most of the resources used. However, as a team we created the lesson plans, materials, and assessments. We all took turns leading individual lessons and shared the responsibility of feedback and assessing final products.

It was approximately a week into our unit, that I realized what we were teaching and how we were teaching it, matched the criteria for the Ignite Award. I started checking out the webpage and asked friends who were on the original committee if our inquiry unit fit the

bill, and it did.

Over the course of the unit, I collected student work and reflections, as well as taking lots of photos. I am very proud of the work we did at James Blair Middle School and am honored that we were given this award. I hope other librarians recognize the efforts they do in their own schools every day and consider applying for the Ignite Award.