The Worldview Literacy Project: Exploring New Capacities for the 21st Century Student

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“While we weren’t paying attention, the industrial age just ended.”

~ Seth Godin

Introduction

While the industrial age may have indeed ended, its influence lives on in every nook and cranny of our educational systems. The way forward is only dimly perceived at this point. How do we lead ourselves out of the entrapments and constraints of the old and into the promise and possibility of the new while creating healthy, curious minds capable of effectively meeting the needs of a world far different from the one into which we were born? What does education in the post-industrial age look like? How do we prepare students for jobs that don’t yet exist? And in a world of exponentially increasing information, how do we distinguish fact from fiction? These questions and many others like them, are facing every educator today, whether they are homeschoolers, traditional teachers, or corporate trainers.

We do not claim to have the answers to these questions. However, we do believe we have a way to effectively explore them in the context of worldview literacy (WVL). The simplest definition of worldview is: the ways in which we
make sense and meaning of the world around us. Largely unconscious, individual worldviews are constellated from the scores of idiosyncratic relationships we each have to our bodies, our families, our communities, our culture, our time, and to the natural world around us. We define Worldview Literacy as the ability to consciously acquire the skills and capabilities we need to understand the nature of our own worldviews, and to become more aware and accepting of the worldviews of others - granting them legitimacy even when they seem quite at odds with our own sense-making - without any need or pressure to adopt their worldview as our own.

The Institute of Noetic Sciences “Worldview Literacy Project”™ introduces an experiential pedagogy designed to increase students’ awareness of their worldviews. We aim to open a conversational space of exploration where diverse worldviews are welcomed with curiosity and wonder, in service to creating the deeper collective understanding and more effective sense-making required to navigate life in the internet-dominated post-industrial age. Designed to be used in middle school and high schools, the curriculum explores the pivotal role that worldview, perspective or point of view plays in perception, information processing and behavior. Educating for awareness of worldview can help students to discover critical connections between lived experience and habits of mind. A great deal has been learned about how people build and share mental models, and incorporate new experiences into these models as well as how they change over time (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999; Gardner, 2006; Kegan, 1982).

**Background**

Worldviews operate at both the individual and the collective levels. Cultures adopt certain tenets and values and proceed to operate out of them until something large enough comes along to create a change. Education in the industrial era was modeled on the efficient running of factories. In most classroom settings, class periods are marked by a starting and ending bell, students are segregated by age, moved from place to place in orderly lines, and seated in forward facing rows of desks with subjects parsed out by specialty. The world that the architects of last century’s educational systems
saw (and therefore attempted to recreate) was a mechanistic one, with the goal of stamping out students as one might stamp out a steel tool.

Today globalization, technology and urbanization increasingly draw together divergent cultures and connect previously isolated regions in ways that have never occurred before. The rate at which information is accumulated and accessed has grown exponentially, challenging us to see the world with new eyes and to adapt our educational systems to meet demands that were inconceivable in the previous era. A growing number of educators and researchers are suggesting that it is no longer possible to separate training of the intellect from the cultivation of emotional and social intelligence. We need to focus not simply on acquiring information, but on understanding ourselves as learners (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

Core fields of knowledge continue to be the focus of mainstream education. Here the emphasis is more on content than process. At the same time, there is a growing need for the development of skills and competencies to successfully meet the challenges of our changing world. In addition to enhancing their academic performance, students today also need to master new personal and social skills that prepare them for the global workplace and society. There is a growing need to promote the understanding and development of both subjective and inter-subjective skills and capacities in order to foster individual and collective resilience in the face of increasing complexity (Kegan, 1994).

Those who seek to empower 21st century students are charged with creating a pedagogy that prepares them for a global society. In this process, they must interface constantly with new information, diverse cultures and ideas, and challenges that require both critical and creative thinking. There is a growing recognition that an effective education emphasizes explicit knowing (facts and figures), tacit knowing (implicit or subjective), technical intelligence (acquiring the know-how to solve problems), as well as nourishing adaptive intelligence (ability to grow beyond our present capabilities) (Kegan & Lahey (2009). We are discovering that how we know is at least as important as what we know.

Among those skills most essential for success in this new era will be greater cognitive flexibility, comfort with unfamiliarity, appreciation of diverse perspectives, ability to hold multiple points of view simultaneously, creative
problem solving, and a capacity for discernment that relies equally on intellect and intuition. Each of these skills requires an appreciation for how worldviews — both our own and those of the people we are interacting with — shape our thoughts, conversations and actions. No matter where they live or what type of school they attend, students will interact daily with people with different perspectives, whose “positionality” (e.g. their life circumstances and personal experiences) — inform their worldview in profoundly different ways (Takacs, 2003).

*Exploring Worldviews*

Each person has his or her own personal story about the nature of reality. Genetic tendencies, religion, culture, and geographic region, together with all the experiences people have both internally and in relationship to their environments, give rise to their *worldview*, or their general way of viewing themselves and the world around them (Schlitz, Vieten, and Miller, 2010).

Psychological, social and neuropsychological theories of development indicate that as we grow and interact with the world we learn to categorize, discriminate, and generalize about what we see and feel (Flavell, Miller & Miller, 2002; Siegler & Alabali, 2005). Worldviews function in similar ways to the internal working models proposed by Bowlby (1969) in that they provide a framework for understanding new experiences and guiding social interactions (Shaver, Collins & Clark, 1996), but they are influenced by more than interactions with attachment figures. A worldview combines beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, values, and ideas to form a comprehensive model of reality. In our worldviews, we construct complex conceptual frameworks to organize our beliefs about who we are and about the world we live in.

Human perceptions are filtered by the ways people view the world. People’s worldviews therefore influence every aspect of how they understand and interact with the world around them. Worldviews profoundly impact individual and shared goals and desires, shaping perceptions, motivations and values both consciously and unconsciously. Worldviews inform human behavior in relationships and choreograph individual and social reactions and actions every moment of the day. They shape our habits of introspection, analysis and communication, influencing the questions we ask, how we make meaning of our experiences, and ultimately the ways we learn.
Identifying Worldview Literacy

We use the term literacy to mean a core competency or skill set. Worldview Literacy (WVL) is the capacity to comprehend and communicate an understanding that information about the world around us is perceived and delivered through the filters of our personal and cultural worldviews. It is the understanding that beliefs are embedded within individual and collective frames of reference and that other people hold different worldviews. It is knowing that our worldviews or models of reality are largely unconscious, and that jointly engaging in practices that raise our awareness of the beliefs and assumptions we hold can allow us to better navigate encounters with differing perspectives. We propose that worldview literacy is a fundamental skill set that is needed by the 21st century student.

The Worldview Literacy Project is situated within the state and national standards. It develops key capacities for college and career readiness as outlined by the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Literacy. As a result, this curriculum is immediately useful to teachers and districts and can easily integrate into existing curricula. The following is quoted from recently published national core standards (Common Core State Standards, 2010):

- They [students] come to understand other perspectives and cultures.

- Students appreciate that the twenty-first-century classroom and workplace are settings in which people from often widely divergent cultures and who represent diverse experiences and perspectives must learn and work together. Students actively seek to understand other perspectives and cultures through reading and listening, and they are able to communicate effectively with people of varied backgrounds. They evaluate other points of view critically and constructively. Through reading great classic and contemporary works of literature representative of a variety of periods, cultures, and worldviews, students can vicariously inhabit worlds and have experiences much different than their own.

If we are to succeed in helping students develop the self-awareness and self-management skills necessary to achieve school and life success, and the social-awareness and interpersonal skills needed to establish and maintain positive relationships, we must help them to develop an awareness of how who we are
shapes what we know about the world, and to encourage examination of knowledge formation processes themselves.

The Worldview Literacy Project

The WVL Project was initially inspired by more than a decade of research conducted at the Institute of Noetic Sciences on worldview and perspective. Since 1997, our team of researchers has actively investigated processes by which people experience fundamental shifts in perception that alter how they view and interact with themselves and the world around them. In particular, our multidisciplinary team of researchers investigated factors that facilitate the kind of worldview transformations that result in increased self and social awareness and pro-social behavior (Schlitz et al., 2008; Schlitz et al., 2010; Vieten, Amorok & Schlitz, 2006; Vieten, Amorok & Schlitz, 2008; Vieten, Schlitz & Amorok, 2009). The identification of these factors led us to believe that there are skills and capacities that can be cultivated to foster introspection, improved discernment, and facility in dealing with divergent worldviews and social conflict.

As we further considered the implications of our research and its potential translation, we began to participate more actively in the national conversation about education for the 21st century. Skills and capacities identified as essential in this era of global connectivity and technological innovation included knowing more about the world, being able to think creatively, learning to discern what information is reliable at a time of information overload, and advanced communication skills for collaboration and conflict resolution in the face of increasing cultural diversity and social complexity. While these skills call for broad-spectrum development, we recognized that all require the ongoing understanding of one's worldview as a fundamental skillset.

In speaking with parents, educators, policy makers, psychologists and social scientists, we identified the need for worldview literacy among youth. They are grappling with developmental challenges and questions of identity that heighten the necessity of tools that can help them learn to navigate the world effectively, ethically, and confidently. We further recognized the need for worldview literacy inside of the school classroom. Based on this, we began to consider the creation of a drop-in curriculum that would introduce students to the idea of worldview and engage them in experiential learning exercises that
would expand their sense of self and the world.

As an experiential curriculum for middle and high-school students, WVL facilitates exploration of the pivotal role that worldview, perspective, or point of view plays in perception, information processing, and behavior. It utilizes several elements of new pedagogy (such as project-based and collaborative learning) that encourage exploration, discovery, and collective learning experiences while encouraging critical thinking, creative problem solving, communication skills, and cultural competence. Students are encouraged to reflect and share their worldviews while gaining tools for understanding the worldviews of others. The goal of WVL is to use direct learning and guided self-reflection to help teachers and students cultivate meta-cognition, including awareness of worldviews, cognitive flexibility, and a capacity to hold conflicting information, as well as social and emotional skills involving perspective taking, connectedness, and pro-social attitudes and behaviors.

Over the course of the lessons, the curriculum 1) introduces the concept of worldview; 2) helps students understand how their perspective or point of view influences how they perceive and therefore, how they act and react; 3) provides experiences (such as optical illusions, paradoxical situations, and contact with differing perspectives) that are meant to increase cognitive flexibility and empower students to examine their own assumptions; 4) uses different types of narrative to explore the way people make meaning of, and communicate, their experiences; and 5) brings increasing awareness to thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, particularly when presented with conflicting perspectives or points of view, thereby allowing them to deal with conflict consciously, rather than reactively. Sample questions for exploration include:

- How do you know what you know?
- Where do beliefs come from?
- Do beliefs change over time?
- How can our beliefs limit us?
- How can our beliefs enliven us?
- How is it helpful to consider multiple perspectives?
- How do we know when something is true?
- Why do people stereotype?
- What does it mean to participate in community?
How do our relationships help us to see ourselves and the world in new ways?

The WVL curriculum is designed to engage students by exploring current real world issues. It incorporates the use of social media by having the students learn with and from schools in dispersed geographic locations. In part, students learn and teach through media narrative – telling stories about their worldview learning via short films, slide shows, animation, interviews, and other multimedia projects. At the conclusion of the program, students are invited to create a project that communicates ideas about worldview and perspective. This curriculum seeks to be a living, global curriculum and students explore and expand worldviews by interacting with others in the world. For example, in one pilot classroom in Oakland, CA, students communicated with students in Palestine via Skype.

**Evaluating WVL in the Classroom**

Preliminary work was begun in 2009 to create curriculum. A pilot program was then conducted in 2010 to test the feasibility and efficacy of the curriculum. This project is based on a specific hypothesis and is grounded in a well articulated theory of change.

*Hypotheses and Theory of Change*

The WVL project is based upon a change model derived from the decadelong study of worldview transformation. Here we identified meta-cognitive reflection on worldview, self-awareness, and self-inquiry as precursors to a developmental movement towards greater social consciousness and pro-social behaviors (Schlitz, et.al, 2010). This lends itself to an organizational framework that we have begun to examine in relation to student and classroom outcomes.

In recent decades, increasing emphasis has been placed on understanding how people learn. This emphasis has suggested a number of key areas that must be addressed by an educational agenda that seeks to reshape learning to meet our times. In particular, contextual learning relates personal experiences to
academic learning, interactive tasks promote cognitive flexibility, and social
learning is stimulated through dialogue and collaborative inquiry (Bransford
et al., 1999; Donovan & Bransford, 2005). Each of these is addressed by the
WVL curriculum.

It is our thesis that two skill sets are developed through the curriculum: 1)
awareness of one's own worldview, meta-cognition, cognitive flexibility, and
ability to hold paradox and conflicting views, and 2) connectedness/sense of
interdependence, systems thinking, perspective-taking, empathy and
compassion. We hypothesize that through increasing students awareness of
their own and other's worldviews, and providing skills for effective
communication, cultural appreciation, and systems thinking, we will observe
greater engagement in learning and improvement of the classroom learning
environment, leading to enhanced academic achievement (see Figure 1
below). Data from our pilot program provide initial support for this
hypothesis.

Figure 1: Theory of Change

Skill Set 1: Awareness of Worldview, Metacognition, Cognitive Flexibility

Educating for awareness of worldview can help students to discover critical
connections between lived experience and habits of mind. A great deal has
been learned about how people build mental models, incorporate new
experiences into these models, and change these models over time (Bransford,
et al., 1999; Gardner, 2006). These findings are only beginning to work their way into educational pedagogy. There is a vast literature exploring the impact of psychological, social and cultural factors in the shaping of human experience. Sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and educators alike have found that people’s worldviews shape their experience of reality (Collins & Pinch, 1998; Schlitz, Vieten & Amorok., 2008). Leading researchers suggest that the building and changing of our mental models, and how we link our mental models together in our heads – our worldview – is much of what learning is about (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, Roth & Smith, 2000). In keeping with this notion, our own longitudinal studies suggest that the most powerful change one can make is the gaining of a new perspective – a meta-cognitive awareness of how one’s own worldview affects their perceptions and actions (Schlitz et al., 2008).

Developmental models have historically placed less focus on skills of self-reflection, meta-cognition, and cognitive flexibility in favor of developing ego strength, a strong sense of self, or a cohesive belief structure. However, one of the most significant impacts of self-reflexivity is increased cognitive flexibility and mental aptitude. Cognitive flexibility and adaptability are considered essential skills for learning, work, and citizenship in the 21st century (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). Adjusting and adapting strategies to accommodate new information and circumstances is an essential capacity that everyone must develop in these fast-changing times. Additionally, adolescence is a unique time in life in which biopsychosocial transitions tend to tax patterns of coping and competence (Simmons & Blyth, 1987; Eccles, Wigfield & Schiefel, 1998). Research efforts examining personal and situational variables associated with promising and problematic achievement and attainments across the adolescent period have found that the more students believe they can develop their abilities or intelligence through their awareness, the more likely they are to approach, persist and master moderately challenging academic tasks (Dweck & Legett, 1988; Bandura, 1997).

Although research suggests that recognizing what you already know from past experiences, and what you currently believe from the latest versions of your mental models, are crucial to becoming a self-aware, internally-motivated learner (Bransford et al., 1999). Indeed, according to Trilling & Fadel, 2009): “the important step of helping learners to reflect on their current mental models [metacognition] is often overlooked” (p. 32). Cultivating
awareness of worldview helps students visualize and develop their internal mental models. Bringing overt attention to internal mental models, and the content and formation of worldviews, is essential given the tendency of social and cultural factors to interact with human cultural, cognitive and biological processes in ways that limit conscious awareness.

Studies of inattentional or perceptual blindness (Simons & Chabris, 1999) illustrate how human brains are “hard-wired” to exclude information that does not fit into their current meaning system. Additionally, the results of research by Dunbar (2008) show that “data inconsistent with one’s expectations are treated as errors and thus not easily incorporated into one’s knowledge representation” (p. 200). fMRI studies with scientists and science students (Dunbar, Fugelsang, & Stein, 2007) suggest that the learning centre of the brain (i.e., the caudate and parahippocampal gyrus) responds favorably to theory-confirming data. At the same time, the brain triggers inhibiting responses in the error detecting portion (anterior cingulated cortex and dorsolateral prefrontal cortex) that helps filter out information that does not match a person’s presuppositions. Such evidence strongly supports the need for educational curricula that fosters the accommodation process and brings awareness to the human tendency to exclude novel information and unfamiliar ideas.

**Skill Set 2: Perspective Taking, Connectedness, Compassion, Empathy**

We hypothesize that increased Worldview Literacy contributes to the development of supportive student relationships. A student who recognizes their own perceptions, assumptions, and biases can approach their own beliefs and opinions with greater flexibility. By recognizing that they have a worldview, and that others hold alternative views, students have an opportunity to formulate cognitive appraisals for reactions that may be associated with positive or negative emotions, and identify how these cognitions and emotions may motivate their behavior. For example, if a student understands that another person’s behavior, clothing, or food choices are due to differences in worldview and that both are part of an interconnected system, he/she may show greater concern and empathy and be better able to contribute to a collective learning environment.

Cultivating WVL also encourages habits of mind that develop students’
capacity to hold paradox and conflicting perspectives. This ability is necessary not only as a cognitive operation, but also as a key to social learning and perceived connectedness. The capacity to work creatively and effectively with others, independent of differences in life experience and culture, is an essential 21st century life skill (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). While education has always been concerned with the basics of good communication – correct speech, fluent reading, and clear writing – digital interfacing and the demands of our times call for much wider and deeper communication and collaboration skills to promote learning together.

When we develop the skills of understanding how we know what we know, how we arrive at our particular worldviews, and how we can assert our own values while also respective those of others, we acquire a number of keys to social connection (Schlitz et al., 2010). As people become more aware of their own perspective and biases, they mature in their capacity to respond consciously to the physical and social world, even in the face of contrasting social pressures. In addition, they begin to appreciate the impact of their thoughts and behaviors, and to think in terms of systems and spheres of influence. Increasing evidence shows that when students feel connected to those around them, they are less likely to uses substances, engage in violence, and report higher levels of emotional wellbeing and academic success (McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum, 2002).

Listening to the stories, experiences and ideas of others with an awareness of worldview allows students to detect both the perspective being offered, and how others’ life experiences lead them in different directions in their thoughts and behavior. Practicing this type of listening can help students to learn from one another in an atmosphere of mutual respect. This decreases the need for defensive behavior, encourages students to interact with others to explore and appreciate their differences, and to gain a fuller sense of self as a contributing member of the communities in which they reside.

Currently, the majority of high school students receive very little training in the ability to navigate conflicting perspectives. This absence may lead to a rise in violence and aggression as different worldviews, cultures, and races come into greater and greater contact (Conoley & Goldstein, 2004). Findings suggest that altering a school’s internal culture can do much to reduce violence even for schools in violent communities (Anderson, 1998).
Mediators: Increased Engagement and Improved Classroom Learning Environment

Studies show that transferring learning from one context to another (i.e., from the classroom to the real world and vice versa) often is not successful, leading students to disengage from classroom learning (Bransford et al., 1999). Research suggests that when students have an emotional connection to what is being learned—a personal experience or a question—attention can be sustained longer, understanding can become deeper, and what is learned can be retained longer (Elias & Arnold, 2006; Darling-Hammond, Barron, Pearson, Schoenfeld, Stage, Zimmerman, Cervetti, & Tilson, 2008). Inviting students to explore their unique perspectives, or worldviews, in a space of academic learning addresses engagement by providing students an opportunity to articulate and examine their own lived experience in a meaningful way (Takacs, 2003; Berman, 1997), and encourages a perception of the classroom as a supportive space for self-discovery.

We anticipate that students higher in WVL will cultivate an improved classroom learning environment. Our experience in our pilot programs was that students became more proactive, skillfully and assertively using their personal expressions and verbal support to promote greater enjoyment of collaborative learning and to gain greater awareness of the link between inner experience and outer behaviors and methods of communication.

Distal Outcome: Academic Achievement

Increased engagement and prosocial behavior in the classroom is further predicted to impact academic achievement. Research has shown that a broad array of motivational benefits, including adolescents’ beliefs about the modifiable or fixed nature of their intelligence, their ability to master academic subject matter, their valuing of that subject matter, and their academic goals are correlates of their cognitive and behavioral engagement in the classroom (Roeser, Strobel & Quihuis, 2002). A supportive and open classroom learning environment also has been linked to social-emotional wellbeing and academic success. Active, self-inspired learning has been shown to foster cognitive habits that support academic mastery across subject-matter (Darling-Hammond et al., 2008).
Pilot Program

Over the past two years, we have developed initial lessons, five of which were codified through a multimedia program available online for a group of trained educators. In an effort to establish proof of principle and to assess feasibility, research concepts, content ideas, and pedagogy, we offered this preliminary curriculum in classrooms in Bay Area high schools, including Sonoma Valley High School in Sonoma, Lionel Wilson Preparatory Academy and the Youth Empowerment School in inner city Oakland.

We pilot tested the essential 5 lessons of the curriculum in local classrooms. We also began codification for lessons 6-15, taking us to 15 lessons as our core curriculum. Lessons 1-5 have been codified with engaging multi-media components. So far we have touched nearly 1500 students, in over 20 classrooms. Currently we are collaborating with 8 high schools, 2 elementary schools and 4 University classrooms to further pilot test the program and assess our ability to translate the skills to other facilitators.

We conducted an onsite program to train facilitators in WVL and over 70 participants attended the workshop. Attendees came from 5 countries and 8 states, and hailed from diverse backgrounds that included not only the education sector, but also hospice, healthcare, business, and coaching, inviting us into an even greater sense of the broad spectrum appeal and application of this work.

Results

Classrooms

Qualitative results from these preliminary efforts were generated through classroom observation, teacher interviews, and student essays and interviews. The results suggest that the WVL curriculum can be scaled across classrooms, based on a multi-media curriculum offered over the internet, and through teacher training. We have seen beneficial effects on students' development, even in communities challenged by low socioeconomic status and inter-
cultural conflict between students. While the results are preliminary, the WVL pilot project provided a platform from which students could better navigate complexity, be more self-aware, make choices with greater discernment, and have greater social and emotional intelligence. We found evidence that students discovered a greater capacity for self-reflection and empathy. They reported more comfort and less reactivity in unfamiliar situations, perceived less separation when faced with diversity, and expanded their sense of ingroup and community identification. In addition, teachers reported that students were more engaged in the learning process, demonstrated greater attentiveness and class participation, and showed notable improvement in the quality of verbal communication and writing skills.

When asked to complete letters of introduction and open-topic essays at the start of the pilot, the majority of students dedicated their attention to a series of facts about their lives (i.e., family make-up, circle of friends, birthplace, jobs, grade level), as well as to their likes and dislikes. By the end of the pilot, the focus of their writing (also with improved grammar and structure although not addressed directly as a part of the curriculum) had shifted notably. Students began to write about the broader communities in which they take part, and spoke to topics of concern to them with a new or expanded interest in local, national, and global issues. Their language was more confident and many spoke to a recognition that through their participation and thoughtful engagement in the WVL project, they could contribute to the creation of positive environments in which to learn and live. In addition, students described transitioning from feeling forced to be in class and afraid to share themselves with their classmates to experiencing the classroom as a place of choice and a community of learners respectful of one another’s values and differences.

Classroom discussions went from disjointed, teacher-directed exercises to authentic conversations in which students commonly drew connections between different perspectives offered and volunteered their opinions. Within weeks, the conversation was largely productive and self-sustaining. Students were able to engage each other in explorations of complex issues, including racism, classism, and sexism, all of which roiled the classroom communities at the start of the curriculum. Student reflections on the experience of the pilot included the following:
“[In the beginning], we talked about making the class a community where every individual has the space to contribute and speak out what is ‘real’ and ‘authentic’ for them while everyone else listens. I tried to imagine what that place would be like but I just couldn’t see anything. Now I have seen it and I think that it is the most beautiful thing ever.” – 11th grade student, Oakland, CA

“I learned to think about things in a whole new way. It gave me a whole new perspective on life. It made it seem as if we are all the same but we all have different ideas. And if we come together we can combine our beliefs in ways that allow us to learn and to find ways to be peaceful.” – 10th grade student, Oakland, CA

“Each day, over time, I learned how one single individual can be significant for the whole world...This class was about finding ‘me,’ my true beliefs and how they can impact surroundings.” – 10th grade student, Oakland, CA

“I don’t think it’s hard to notice that our world has serious issues. It’s hard to deny the facts, and yet we do. When hunger, poverty, climate, and violence, to name a few, are clear problems, how is it that many remain with their arms crossed and don’t reach out? I began to learn how we can start to see each other, how we can learn to new ways to know ourselves and each other, and to work together.” – 11th grade student, Oakland, CA

Preliminary Training for Educators

In addition to all that we learned from working with the students, the preliminary efforts made clear the need to focus also on teacher education. Preliminary development efforts suggested that without proper attention to the role of the teacher, the classroom community cannot form, as it is the teacher who models coming into an awareness of how to listen for the value of each person’s perspective and dialogue across difference. We recognize that in order to create thriving learning environments, teachers themselves must be supported in becoming 21st century learners. This includes being comfortable learning from inquiry, design, and collaborative approaches. It also necessitates ongoing training for educators that offers them tools for self-awareness and mindfulness, as well as opportunities to explore their own
biases and assumptions, practice different methods of listening, conversing
and eliciting the participation, and share challenges and best practices with
other educators.

In August 2010, we offered the first WVL training opportunity for educators
interested in participating in the development and piloting of the curriculum.
Over the course of 3 days, workshop participants were invited to experience
the first 5 lessons, to work together to explore their own worldviews and
questions, and to learn and practice our unique pedagogy. The response to the
workshop was overwhelmingly positive, and we are fielding many requests for
more of its kind. Below are representative comments from post-workshop
evaluations:

“[I’m most excited about] the potential of the lessons to adapt to many
situations – the global potential...[and] the opportunity to be part of and
contribute to an effort that has the potential to make such a huge difference.”

“[I loved] the sense of co-ownership, potential for development, community
support and practical application.”

Conclusions

The WVL Project is unique, relevant, and timely. Based on both theory and
research, we have seen that the project can lead to a more effective classroom
learning environment. With this can come better communication, less teasing
and bullying, more inclusion of those whose worldviews are different, fewer
feelings of isolation in those who feel they are different, and greater capacity to
work as teams and risk sharing creative ideas.

We’ve seen that the WVL project holds promise to equip students with the
tools and skills they need to become global citizens in the 21st Century. We
believe that when students develop an embodied sense that their own
worldview is inextricably linked to their culture, region, religion, upbringing,
environment, and personal experiences, and when they understand that
everyone they meet is also inside their own worldview – then they will be
better able to embrace the perspectives of others. This understanding can
generate a greater connectedness, compassion and empathy – hopefully leading to more and better options for discovering and creating mutually desired futures.

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**Bibliography**


