

Genius Hour

Based on an initiative designed by Google to promote employee engagement and productivity, “Genius Hour”, or 20% time, gives students the opportunity to dedicate part of the school day to work on research-based projects that are of interest to them. In these student-initiated inquiries, students develop and answer questions to deepen their understanding of something they are interested in, and use this discovery to create a final project. Ginsberg and Coke (2019) provide three classroom approaches for “Genius Hour” projects:

1. **Independent, Student-Selected Inquiry:** In this approach the student selects a topic they are passionate about. Ginsberg and Coke (2019) share that this could be a social impact project such as researching and creating a project to promote LGBTQ equality and belonging or less serious topics such as the variety of flavor options for Ramen noodles.
2. **Small-Group or Whole-Class Designed Inquiry:** While an individual project may be overwhelming for some students, a group or whole-class approach may be more effective. One classroom was studying globalization and the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals. Students were divided into groups based on their interest in a specific global goal. Similarly, a teacher can present a topic to the whole-class and encourage them to spend class time researching the topic and discussing the research they find as a class.
3. **Curricular Project, or Book-Based Inquiry:** Students are encouraged to relate their project to class themes and topics and to use popular books in their research. An example given

by Ginsberg and Coke(2019) was of a student who wanted to focus her project on experiences faced by immigrants and their assimilation to a new culture and she based her project on the experiences she read in novels or podcasts.

Grade Level:	Upper Elementary- 12th
Materials:	Paper, pencil, additional materials as needed for project
Duration:	20% of class time or about 10-15 minutes per class period of 60 minutes
Implementation:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Provide students with examples of student projects or other children who have made an impact with their ideas in the community (one study recommends the Cain’s Arcade video-link included below)2. Walk your students through various brainstorming activities to start thinking about possible topics3. Provide students with a set of questions such as: “What do you do when no one is telling you what to do?”, "What are you good at?", "What do you wonder?", and "How would you better yourself?" to help them discover their passions until they come up with four. (Ginsberg & Coke, 2019, p.18).4. Students work to combine these passions into a topic and plan for their project. They then create a project pitch- including their motivations for doing the activity, a timeline and goals for the project.5. Have a conference with each student to check in on the planning of their project

Does it work?

Genius hour, or 20% time, has been integrated into businesses like Google with amazing results (Pink, 2009). When students are given a portion of time to pursue their creative interests, they learn cross-disciplinary skills in an authentic context. For example, a kindergarten classroom implemented Genius Hour as part of their literacy instruction. Students practiced reading information texts, gathering information from valid sources, synthesizing information, and presenting materials (West & Roberts, 2016). These kindergartners learned how to make their big ideas, such as “building rocket shoes,” a reality through researching and developing their projects (West & Roberts, 2016, p.1). Though much research on the effects of a Genius hour intervention in the classroom is mostly anecdotal at this point, the implementation of Genius hour has been reported to increase students’ enjoyment and motivation in school (Juliani, 2014).

References:

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Fawson, S., Bates, M., & Boren, D. M. (n.d.). *Addressing Wellbeing In Schools*. EdTech Books.
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