

## The Opportunity Myth: Meet Hajima

Throughout today's session about *The Opportunity Myth: What Students Can Show Us About How School Is Letting Them Down – and How to Fix It*, you'll follow the experiences of **Hajima**, a twelfth-grader who detailed how she's nervous she won't be prepared to reach her career goals as a result of the education she's received in her high school.



"My parents came here to America for my education. It's very important for me." Hajima chose her high school—a public school in a medium-sized northeastern city—specifically to meet her career goals. "I came here because of the new medical program and what they had to offer me," she says.

She's part of a specialized medical pathways track, intended to prepare students to work immediately after high school in a hospital setting (as a medical assistant), while simultaneously earning college credit.

Hajima intends to be the first person in her family to go to college. Her family came to the United States as refugees in 2005. Her older siblings struggled academically in America, in part, Hajima explains, because of the language barrier. But she was younger when the family resettled, and adjusted well. She enjoyed school. Her father, she explains, wants her to go to college so she can avoid the kind of "suffering" he's experienced working in a local factory.

That's her plan, too. "I'm hoping to be a neurologist."

In fact, Hajima transferred to her current school from another public high school—one with higher test scores and more advanced course offerings—explicitly because she'd been enticed by the promise of the school's medical assistant program.

Considering that Hajima joined her new school based on the promise that it would prepare her for pre-med studies in college, she was shocked to learn upon arrival that there were *no* advanced placement math or science courses available to her.

She maxed out on the school's math offerings as a junior. "They only have up to pre-calc," she says. "I took that last year. If we feel the classes they have aren't challenging for us, there are no other options."

It isn't lost on Hajima that the academic experiences she has access to at her current school—where her classmates are primarily Black—are weaker than those at her previous school (in the same district), which is primarily white. The tradeoffs have been painful. She reflects on her choice to move schools, in pursuit of *better* preparation for a medical career: "I don't really regret moving here because of all the new friends. It's just education-wise, I do, because it's not challenging."

She'd jump at the opportunity to learn more. "We *want* to be more prepared," she says.

When Hajima and her best friend talk about how it feels to sit in classes that aren't challenging enough, they speak of watching the clock. "The time goes super slow," Hajima's friend explains. In their physics class, for example, they might get through all the content in the first twenty minutes—and then have nothing to do. It worries Hajima deeply when she considers her future.

Today, we'll pause throughout the day's presentation, and you'll dig into the experiences Hajima had in her 12<sup>th</sup> grade College Composition class (for which she'll receive college credit) on a given day in the 2016-2017 school year, focused on the question: **Will Hajima be well-prepared to reach her goal of being a neurologist?**

*Please stop here and don't read ahead in your packet – we'll direct you to the right page when it's time to flip ahead!*

## What types of assignments did Hajima work on in her 12<sup>th</sup> grade College Composition class?

Here is one example assignment that Hajima experienced in her 12<sup>th</sup> grade College Composition class. *Note that we recreated this assignment to collapse it into one page but kept all the major tasks students were asked to complete; Hajima also received a rubric to evaluate her work on this assignment.*

### Process Description Essay

This will account for your first 3 grades of the final marking period.

- Mon 4/24 – Written Directions – 25 points
- Wed 4/26 – Finished Product – 20 points
- Friday 4/28 – Paragraph Reflection – 25 points

**Day 1: Build your object.** Working with your partner, use the following materials to construct anything that you'd like.

- Construction paper
- Markers, crayons, colored pencils
- Scissors, rulers, tape, glue
- Mini marshmallows (not for eating ☺)
- Toothpicks
- Popsicle sticks
- Cotton balls

Take explicit notes on each step that you take to construct your object. (*Explicit* means stated clearly and in detail, leaving no room for confusion and doubt.)

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**Day 2: Written Directions.** Type your directions (including a list of materials and steps) and submit it for a grade, then rebuild your project based on your steps as a test run.

How did rebuilding your project go?

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**Day 3: Finished Project.** Trade directions with another team in class and build what they have described. Compare what you built to the finished project.

**Day 4: Paragraph Reflection.** Write a paragraph to reflect on the assignment from start to finish.

- What were your initial thoughts on the assignment?
- How well did your team work together?
- What was the most difficult/easiest part of the process?
- How well did the other team follow your directions? Why?
- How did your team do following their directions? Why?
- What would you do differently if you had to do this again?
- What are your final thoughts on the assignment?

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## What type of instruction did Hajima receive in her 12<sup>th</sup> grade College Composition class?

This observation occurred on Day 4, when students were writing their paragraph reflection about the assignment. The objective on the board was “Students will reflect on their process by writing a well-constructed and thoughtful paragraph.”

*These notes are organized as “teacher actions” and “student actions” so you can get a feel for what both the teacher and students were doing throughout the lesson. They have been streamlined for the ease of this activity.*

Time	Teacher Action Notes	Student Action Notes
8:15	Teacher explains what the students should be working on: “You are working to write your paragraph reflection on the assignment, typing your thoughts into your Chromebook. You’re going to answer the questions listed on the slide.” <i>These questions match the questions on the assignment you reviewed.</i>	Students open their computers and start working to write their paragraphs.  18/21 students are typing; 3/21 students are talking to each other and not typing.
8:20	The teacher addresses class, reiterating expectations that students should be writing their essay paragraphs.	17/21 students are writing their paragraphs on their computers; 4/21 students are talking to each other.  One student (who is not typing) raises her hand: “Can you help me log in?”
8:23	The teacher checks in with some kids who are having trouble logging in after student question.  “Let me restate what you need to finish by the end of the period. You need to have a perfectly written paragraph to reflect on this process – you need to reflect on everything we’ve done in the last week and a half.”	All students are now logged into their computers.  Student: “Can you remind me where the questions are? I can’t remember them.”
8:27	The teacher reminds the one student where the questions are on the assignment handout.	21/21 students have their computers out and are typing; no students are talking to each other.
8:30	The teacher circulates to individual students, prompting them to use MLA formatting correctly.	21/21 students have their computers out and are typing; no students are talking to each other.
8:41	The teacher to the whole class: “Remember, the rubric is also included there. I’m looking for a perfect MLA heading, title, and eight to twelve thoughtful, complex sentences.”  The teacher checks in with a student and tells a student some things he’s missing from his paragraph.  The teacher works with the individual student on MLA formatting.	Student: “I don’t know how to do the MLA thing.”  All other students are working quietly on their paragraphs.  3/21 students are finished with their paragraphs. One whispers, “What do we do now?” Her classmate responds, “I don’t know.”
8:45	The teacher to whole class: “Next week, we’ll be writing a problem solution essay; it can be a problem in the world, something big, it could be something smaller in your experience, like kids in the hallway cutting class. You’re going to have to do a little research on it! This paragraph helped us get ready for that.” <Bell rings>	Students put their computers away and leave.

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## How engaged was Hajima in her 12<sup>th</sup> grade College Composition class?

Here are Hajima’s responses to our daily student survey while she was working on the Process Description Essay project. Overall, Hajima was **engaged**.

Today, class was...	<input type="radio"/> Too easy	<input type="radio"/> A little too easy	<input checked="" type="radio"/> Just right	<input type="radio"/> A little too hard	<input type="radio"/> Too hard
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Today...	Not true	A little true	Mostly true	Very true
Class was about something interesting.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I really liked what we were doing in class.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I was thinking more about class than anything else.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

  

Today during class, I felt...	No	Yes
Happy	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Excited about learning	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Successful	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Smart	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Confused	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Angry	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Proud	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Focused	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
Bored	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

  

Today in class...	No	Yes
Did you wish you were doing something different?	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Did you wish you had more chances to share your ideas?	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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Class today was about something...

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	Not true	A little true	Mostly true	Very true
I can use outside of school.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Important to my life right now.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Important to my future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I already know how to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

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## What expectations did Hajima’s 12<sup>th</sup> grade College Composition teacher have for her students’ success against the standards?

We asked Hajima’s twelfth grade College Composition teacher to respond to the following questions on a teacher survey, which we used to create an expectations construct. Hajima’s teacher had **Moderately Low Expectations** for her students’ success against the standards.

Statement	Response
Students are overburdened by the demands of our state’s standards.	Somewhat Agree
My students need something different than what is outlined in our state’s standards.	Strongly Agree
The standards make it difficult for students to learn basic skills in my subject.	Somewhat Disagree
Our state’s standards are too challenging for my students.	Somewhat Agree