

The Opportunity Myth: Meet Luz

Fall 2018



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 **Luz**, an 11th-grader who told us how much her teachers' expectations matter.

Luz loves to read. In fact, sometimes she doesn't do her homework because she's reading so much outside of school. She wishes all her classes were as engaging for her as the books she explores on her own time, which include fiction and nonfiction; anything, really (except history).

Luz's vision of the future isn't quite clear yet, but she thinks teaching might be a possibility. "I know I want to do something with kids," she says. She's enrolled in a class that prepares students to work with children. They're mentoring ninth graders. But the class is dry. "It's a lot of reading research and summarizing it," she says. The assignments she finds most interesting—in classes like AP English—ask her to construct an argument based on evidence from texts and her own perspective. She wishes all her classes offered her more opportunities to do that kind of work.

"Throughout elementary and middle school, I tried really hard," she says. "Straight A student, perfect attendance, that kind of thing. Then freshman year happened, and I got some Ds and Cs. I cried. I cried. I had never gotten a C at the end of the year, or a D. When I saw it happen in freshman year, I was like, 'Wow. What happened?'"

Luz is a junior in high school. Her school, which serves roughly 500 students, was part of a larger public high school that was closed for poor performance and broken into four smaller schools several years ago. She is reflective about what happened in her transition to high school. Some of the dip in her grades, she says, was because she was unprepared for the challenge of her high school classes.

"I feel like it was a struggle between the difference between the expectations that were given to you in middle school, and then the expectations at high school. I feel that messed me up."

As she adapted to high school (and with some pressure at home from her father), she raised those grades back up to As and Bs. But she also describes the importance of having teachers who not only push her, but also support her.

"[In] biology, there was a lot of words I didn't understand," she says. "When I needed help, my teacher didn't really help me. I would ask questions. She would answer them, but they weren't what I wanted, so I would have to go to other students. Sometimes they didn't understand it, so I didn't understand it."

For Luz, getting help when she asks for it is an essential component of success in the classroom. "They got to help me when I need help. *Actually* help me. I feel like having a relationship with your student is important. The teachers that have high expectations for you in their class, you actually try harder, because you want to show you can meet those expectations. But when teachers give up on their students, you're like, 'Why should I try if my teacher's not giving it a try?'"

Now, in the second semester of her junior year, just as Luz is starting to consider college (which she wants to attend), her grades are starting to slip again. She feels herself disengaging from school more often, and she's missing the positive relationships with teachers that anchor her to school. "If I don't really connect with that teacher, then it's like, why am I in your class? I feel like that's what it is."

Today, we'll pause throughout the day's presentation, and you'll dig into the experiences Luz had in her AP Language class on a given day in the 2016-2017 school year, focused on the question: **Will Luz be well-prepared to reach her goal of going to college and eventually working with children?**

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 type of instruction did Luz receive in her AP Language class?

The objective on the board was “Students will write a practice AP essay.”

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
8:40	<p>Teacher: “Welcome to class. Please start on your warm-up.”</p> <p>Teacher begins to circulate to check homework completion.</p>	14/14 students have out their notebooks and are responding to the warm-up prompt, which asks them to reflect on how prepared they feel for the upcoming AP Language assessment.
8:45	<p>Teacher: “Okay, what we’re going to do today is prepare for the AP exam on Wednesday by looking at the 3 AP short answer questions from last year. By the end of the class you are expected to have completed the thesis and claim generator process for each of the three essays, and then fully write one of them. Then if you have time you’ll start working on another one. If you’re not taking the AP exam, then you’re doing a practice essay for our final.”</p> <p>Teacher passes out prompts to students.</p>	
8:47	Teacher: “Okay, you’re on the clock.” <Starts timer.>	11/14 students start annotating immediately. 1/14 students is on her phone, 2/14 students are whispering to each other.
8:49	The teacher privately speaks to the three off-task students.	All three students begin reading and annotating.
9:02	<p><Timer goes off> Teacher: “Okay, your reading time has ended. If you’re not all the way done reading yet that’s okay, you can keep reading. But you’ll want to move on the writing in 5 minutes or so. Remember you’ll have to budget your time when you’re doing the test, so that’s why we’re practicing this now.”</p> <p><Sets timer for 40 minutes.></p>	14/14 students are working silently and independently.
9:15	<p>Teacher circulates, whispering feedback to students and reading their theses.</p> <p><i>This continues throughout the remainder of the 40 minutes.</i></p>	<p>12/14 students are working silently and independently. 2/14 students are on their phones.</p> <p><i>The majority of students are on task throughout the period, with a few moments of minor distraction for some students.</i></p>
9:42	<p><Timer goes off> Teacher: “Okay, I’ll collect these and read them and share feedback with you tomorrow so we can continue to prepare for our AP test.”</p> <p><Class ends></p>	Students submit their writing assignments by passing it up to the front of their rows.

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How engaged was Luz in her AP Language class?

Here are Luz's responses to our daily student survey while she was working on AP practice essay. Overall, Luz was **Minimally Engaged**.

Today, class was...	<input type="radio"/> Too easy	<input checked="" type="radio"/> A little too easy	<input type="radio"/> Just right	<input type="radio"/> A little too hard	<input type="radio"/> Too hard
Today...					
		Not true	A little true	Mostly true	Very true
Class was about something interesting.		<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I really liked what we were doing in class.		<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input 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 checked="" type="radio"/>	<input 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 type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>		
Today in class...					
		No	Yes		
Did you wish you were doing something different?		<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>		
Did you wish you had more chances to share your ideas?		<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>		

Class today was about something...

	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 type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Important to my future.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I already know how to do.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

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What expectations did Luz's AP Language teacher have for her students' success against the standards?

We asked Luz's AP Language teacher to respond to the following questions on a teacher survey, which we used to create an expectations construct. Luz's teacher had **Moderately High 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.	Somewhat 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.	Disagree