

Teaching college coursework to historically under-served youth: Initial Findings and promising practices from the pilot

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August 2023

OVERVIEW OF THE PILOT



New Paths to Career Success (NP2CS) is a holistic effort to build equitable access to sustainable careers for **students who have been previously underserved** by bridging high school into career and college. NP2CS is a pilot initiative of the **CUNY Office of K16 Initiatives** working with **Kingsborough Community College (KBCC)** in collaboration with the **NYC Mayor's Office of Talent and Workforce** Development, made possible through the generous support of **Jobs For the Future Catalyze Challenge** and **FutureReady NYC**.

From February 2023 to May 2024, the pilot initiative works with a cohort of youth aged 17-22. The pilot aims to test improvements in approaches to:

- **Connecting secondary school, college, and work experiences** for students to move on a seamless path through these.
- **Providing career-connected learning experiences**, combining workforce training with academic preparation.
- **Integrating supports for under-served students** to get the access, networks, and credentials to succeed.

The Career Foundation Course. From February to June 2023, the pilot offered a dual-credit, dual-enrollment course to youth who were in their last year at six Brooklyn alternative high schools.

- At each school, the principal identified an **experienced teacher** who was vetted to be certified as adjunct faculty by Kingsborough Community College (KBCC).
- These faculty **taught one of two courses**: SD-10/11, a pair of 1-credit courses in career and college planning, or SP-11, a 3-credit that focused on career communications.
- At 4 of 6 schools, the course was **scheduled as part of the high school day** to make it more accessible for historically under-served youth.
- **Programmatic support** provided to teachers included classroom visits, facilitated sharing of practice, and guidance in development of materials and lesson plans.

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Partner schools and the unique population of students served

Students in New Paths to Career Success had not participated in college coursework before. At five of the six schools, College Now was a new partnership. At the sixth, students who were encouraged to enroll in the course were ones who had not attended College Now courses before.

STUDENTS IN TRANSFER SCHOOLS

New Paths to Career Success partnered with **five NYC transfer schools** in Brooklyn:

- Liberation Diploma Plus
- Olympus Academy
- Professional Pathways High School
- South Brooklyn Community High School
- Urban Dove Team Charter

"Transfer schools provide a safe haven for students who were left behind by traditional schools, meaning we fell through the cracks because we didn't fit the traditional template. We are, like many students, unique and transfer schools nourish our uniqueness to make us set and excel our expectations."

*- **Cristal Cruz**, Human Rights Activist and Transfer School Alum (Quoted in *Still I Rise*)*

Approximately 13,000 students are served by 55 transfer schools in New York City.

- **Alternative High Schools:** Transfer Schools are designed to re-engage overage under-credited (OAU) youth who did not meet markers of progress in other high schools.
- **An Issue of Equity:** Transfer school students are disproportionately Black, Latino, and in low income households.
- **Uncertain Futures:** Transfer school graduates are less likely than their counterparts to enroll in college and to far more likely to become out of school out of work (OSOW).



Partner schools and the unique population of students served

Students in New Paths to Career Success had not participated in college coursework before. At five of the six schools, College Now was a new partnership. At the sixth, students who were encouraged to enroll in the course were not the "typical" College Now participants.

STUDENTS IN INTERNATIONALS SCHOOLS

New Paths to Career Success partnered with one Internationals Network school:

- International High School at Lafayette

Internationals Network for Public School is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to provide quality public education for recently arrived immigrants by growing and sustaining a strong national network of innovative public schools, while sharing proven best practices and influencing policy for multilingual learners on a national scale.

Approximately 6,000 students are served by 14 high schools in the Internationals Network in New York City.

- **Alternative High Schools:** Designed to support newcomers who have arrived in the country within the last four years.
- **An Issue of Equity:** Students are disproportionately Latino, in low income households, and English language learners (ELL).
- **Uncertain Futures:** Obstacles after graduation can impede transitioning into college or career, increasing the likelihood that youth become out of school out of work (OSOW).



Challenges, Lessons, and Approaches

This document highlights challenges, lessons, and approaches observed in the Spring 2023 offered as an introduction to career exploration for historically underserved youth in New Paths to Career Success. Addressing these challenges helped faculty achieve high youth engagement, which in turn to high passing rates and strong performance on course assessments in a college course that was a first for virtually all students involved.

Challenges to college success for historically underserved youth

Underserved youth often feel disconnected from typical school and course content, as they find irrelevant to their lived experience or future goals.

Inspiring college-level coursework has often been out of reach for underserved youth who therefore cannot picture themselves as "college material."

Underserved youth often do not see their own options in future careers, and have not been able to practice the fundamental career skills employers are looking for.

Lessons from adaptations made in pilot classes

Employ **youth-centered, culturally-relevant** practices centering equity.

Develop youth capacity to access rigorous **college-level** material.

Support exploration and skill development that explicitly ties to **careers**.

Approaches observed and recorded here

- Create opportunities for joy and building community
- Create opportunities for students to tell their stories
- Discuss social justice and issues relevant to youth

- Scaffold youth access to content and skills
- Metacognitively navigate common college experience

- Help students explore themselves to explore work
- Infuse explicit teaching of core career skills

Challenge identified in pilot:

Underserved youth often feel disconnected from typical school and content, perceiving these to be disconnected from their lived experience or future goals.

LESSONS FROM PILOT: Centering Youth

Educators adapted lessons to add elements that were youth-centered and culturally-relevant. **Youth-centered activities** allowed youth to bring their **perspective, voice, and identity** into learning such that they could more easily see how the topic was relevant to them. **Culturally-relevant** activities enabled youth to feel a **greater sense of belonging and confidence** by helping them connect their own background and families' experiences to what they were learning. Adaptations in the pilot included:

APPROACHES OBSERVED IN PILOT:

Faculty in the pilot adapted the curriculum to incorporate more youth-centered activities. Three approaches observed in the pilot are highlighted in the ensuing pages:

- Activities that incorporated **joy and community building**
- Opportunities for students to **tell their stories** as part of assignments
- Intentional exploration of **social justice issues and related topics relevant to youth**



RATIONALE



When faculty **build a relationship** with students, it helps them feel more **sense of belonging and openness to learning**. This trust is key to class engagement.



When assignments let students **be seen and feel heard**, it humanizes the experience, helping youth **make connections into skills** they are practicing.



When activities critically **dismantle systems of racism and inequity**, they help **students find space and connection** in the college/postsecondary landscape.

Create opportunities for joy and community building

College-level work is academically rigorous. For youth who have not been served well by school in the past, however, that rigor needs an entry point that is welcoming. Faculty adapted assignments to add fun, collaborative, interactive activities among students. Far from making classes less rigorous, as some might worry, this helped youth have the motivation to engage with rigor.



Providing youth with a way to be seen and heard

Building relationships to enable deeper learning in follow-up

PROMISING PRACTICE FROM THE PILOT

Game Integration into Lecture

Developed by Nina Coates

- The starting team selects a player to go first.
- That player will grab a piece of paper from the fishbowl and read it. The 1-minute timer will start as soon as they pick a piece of paper from the fishbowl.
- The player will then use words to get their teammates to guess the word or phrase that is on the paper. They cannot use gestures — only words. They can't say any of the words that

The Speech-11 course deepens students' knowledge of the process of communication through lecture, textbook readings, and question responses. In this adaptation, Professor Coates modified the lecture to incorporate multiple game-based activities, like charades and Taboo, creating a playful and joyful space where students were open to exploring. It was important that the interactive activities connected to the course content: Since the course was about communications, these games lent themselves to reflection on different types of communication. After the rounds, students link what they learned about the communication process to their lived experience.

"Fear and curiosity are completely opposites in terms of the way in which they engage condition and memory. When you're curious you're open, you're safe, you're in a kind of intellectually playful place in which you're sort of exploring possibilities." — Mary Helen Immordino-Yang, [Sept. 2020 interview](#)

"...schools educating students of color often focus on rote, linear, and prescriptive teaching practices. In the midst of this, the learning content oftentimes neglects to teach them to experience joy and contentment.... I suggest making joy a learning goal.... It emerges when we integrate more art, poetry, and music into our instruction and when we create learning experiences that encourage students to have fun and problem solve, with their voices (and perspectives) centered." — Gholdy Muhammad, [Cultivating Genius \(2020\)](#)

Create opportunities for youth to tell their stories.

High-quality college courses provide activities to teach and criteria to assess core academic skills. But attending a college class can be daunting. While applying these skills in an *academic* setting is key, faculty in the pilot adapted courses to apply these skills first to the *personal*. This addressed two key rationale:



Providing youth with a way to be seen and heard,

Building relationships to enable deeper learning in follow-up

PROMISING PRACTICE FROM THE PILOT

My Most Prized Possession
developed by Melissa Meyers

The Task: Think of your most prized-possession. It must be a ma like “my life” or “my mom.” Complete the outline questions below presentation that we will work on together.

In a 1-2 minute presentation, name and describe your most prized include information about what the item is, where you got it from

The syllabus for Speech-11, the course taught in NP2CS, included expectations for youth to study and practice persuasive speech, informative speech, and other aspects of communication. In this promising practice from the pilot, Meyers created space for students to bring in their own identities through a personal topic before diving into more abstract ones. In this innovative adaptation, the professor introduces communications concepts, then asks students to use those concepts by preparing and giving a two-minute presentations about themselves through a prized possession. Starting with this personal presentation provided a safer, more familiar entry point for students before giving more academic presentations. The assignments also enabled the professor to begin to build relationships with students by learning about who they are and what they already know, while helping students to build social capital by sharing something about themselves and learning about their peers.

“Culturally relevant/sustaining/revitalizing/reality pedagogies... seek to open up worlds of possibilities for each student to bring his or her whole self into the classroom and into the world.” — Gloria Ladson-Billings, Three Decades of Culturally Relevant, Responsive, & Sustaining Pedagogy (2021)

“Your subject is not just your content area. The job of the teacher is to first work toward fully understanding the people and experiences that have shaped them, reconcile the tensions between who they are and who they profess to be, and then get as far away as possible from any script that doesn’t align with who they are.” — Chris Emdin, Ratchetdemic (2021)

Discuss social justice and topics that youth feel are relevant to their lives

For youth from groups that have been historically kept out of systems of power in the United States, an unspoken truth is that the skills taught in institutions like college are part of that system. Integrating issues of racial and social justice into course discussion makes the unspoken spoken so that youth can intentionally discuss issues that matter to them. This addressed two key rationale:



Providing youth with a way to be seen and heard,



Critically dismantling systems of racism and inequity.

PROMISING PRACTICE FROM THE PILOT

Code Switching Speech

Developed by Anna Smith

My Code Switching Story

Describe a time when you had to code switch to be understood. What was your code switch? What were the “codes” that you were switching to? Who was more vulnerable or powerful? Did it make you feel connected to the group? Was your communication successful? What did you learn? Explain.

As in many college courses, Speech- 11 asked students to infuse ideas from readings with skills, in this case skills of communication. In **Code Switching Speech**, Smith adapted an assignment to blend communications concepts with readings on a social justice topic with which students had direct experience. The assignment asked students to select from four prompts with varying levels of intimacy. The topic provided three layers of learning: engaging students in critical societal inquiry, introducing code switching as a communication skill, and practicing skills core to the class. This content allows space for students to consider privilege and power outside of them, as well as the power of owning their own ways of being. Assignments were graded using the same rubric and criteria as for future academic presentations in the class.

“Criticality is the capacity to read, write, and think in ways of understanding power, privilege, social justice, and oppression.... When youth have criticality, they are able to see, name, and interrogate the world not only to make sense of injustice, but also to work toward social transformation.”

— **Gholdy Muhammad**, *Cultivating Genius* (2020)

“Our research found that when it is difficult to make a task interesting it can be helpful to focus on creating personal meaning by promoting a prosocial, self transcendent purpose for learning....

Cultivating motives that transcend the self could provide them with the personal meaning they need to sustain self.” — **David Yeager**, *Boring but Important* (2014)

Challenge Identified in Pilot:

Inspirational college-level coursework has often been out of reach for underserved youth.

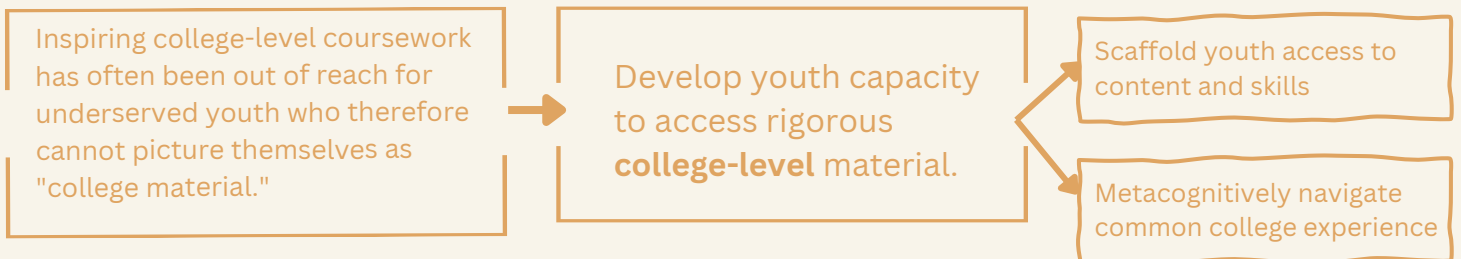
LESSONS FROM PILOT: Considering College

Educators adapted the curriculum to make the college experience clear and accessible for youth. **Scaffolding creates a bridge** that allows students access to content and assignments that are challenging for them. It is necessary for all levels of learners. **Being metacognitive about navigating universal college experiences** gives students the language, real life practice, and space to make and revise mistakes in a world that is often not accessible to them.

APPROACHES OBSERVED IN PILOT:

Faculty in the pilot adapted the curriculum to incorporate more explicit focus on college. Two approaches observed in the pilot are highlighted in the ensuing pages:

- Incorporate scaffolds, such as worksheets, checklists, group roles, and multi-sensory experiences, that support students' access to both the content and skills
- Metacognitively articulate ways of navigating universal college experiences



RATIONALE



When students can **visualize the products** they work they will be doing, they can confidently address more complicated tasks.



When educators **break complex tasks into smaller steps**, it renders material more digestible and helps students learn how to do the same.



When new experiences related to college are **explicitly introduced and reviewed**, youth become more familiar and comfortable with them.

Scaffold youth access to content and skills.

A college syllabus can be daunting. Pacing one's learning and breaking foreboding large tasks into manageable small ones are staples of success. While such skills are often expected by the time students enroll in college courses, if youth have not yet acquired these skills it behooves teachers to teach them.



Visualizing products helps youth confidently address more complicated tasks



Breaking tasks into smaller steps makes content and skills more digestible

Speech-11, like many college classes, covers extensive content and skill-building activities. Students needed fundamental study skills to access these, even though these were not officially on the course syllabus. Across the pilot faculty consistently scaffolded these extensive tasks with support for needed study skills, typically using three methods. First, some faculty used **pacing calendars** in which they planned day by day how they would develop learning. Third, others used **critical-thinking outlines** to plan a three-step process across lessons from introducing a topic, to gradually releasing responsibility for learning to students, to facilitating student reflection on learning. Third, **worksheets** helped students youth organize their thinking. These included checklists to outline steps, sentence starters to practice language, and graphic organizers to break long written pieces into their discrete elements.

PROMISING PRACTICES IN THE PILOT

Pacing Calendar and Lesson Outlines

Developed by Cynthia Green

Ted Talk Response,

Developed by Deborah Gillick

Nonverbal communication in film,

Developed by Anna Smith

Passion Project Speech

Developed by Nina Coates

Week 1	2/8 - Session 1 - Orientation 1. Syllabus 2. Ice-Breaker 3. Values
Week 2	2/15 - Session 3 - Career Choices 1. Career Research

Passion Project Speech

Directions:

1. Use the outline below to plan your Passion Project
2. Develop visuals in google slides or Prezi, or a video or speech
3. Transfer your notes to notecards to deliver your speech

Hook Catch your audience's attention right away with a **definition. quote. short anecdote. hypothetical.**

"Let's assume they can all do good work, and let's attend to the ways that they need us to teach them in order to get there.... We do much better if we start with what we consider to be high-end curriculum and expectations—and then differentiate to provide scaffolding, to lift the kids up." – Carol Ann Tomlinson, [Sept. 2018 Interview]

Metacognitively articulate and navigate typical college experiences

College has its own set of practices and expectations that can be like a foreign land. For instance, reading a syllabus, using office hours, talking to a professor about missing a class, studying for tests, and planning for multi-week assignments were often new to youth in the pilot. Faculty explicitly discussed these skills and highlighted that they are part of the college experience.



Explicitly introduce and review college experiences to increase youth familiarity and comfort.

PROMISING PRACTICE FROM THE PILOT

Speech 11 Syllabus

Developed by Michele Hamilton

Communication at Work	Activities/Projects
How is communication at work different than communication with friends and family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tips for Professors • Write emails and call, Zoom call professor or boss • Code Switching

The course in the pilot included typical college course materials and policies, such as a syllabus, slide lectures, textbooks, attendance expectations, and professor office hours. Since this course was youth's first college experience, they did not know how to navigate it. Professors set out to explain each piece, **providing a bridge for students between their high school and college experiences**. In the adaptation provided here, the professor created a scaffolded syllabus and then taught her students how to read and use it. **Attendance expectations and submission deadlines** were especially challenging for many youth in the pilot. Faculty sought to turn challenging expectations into learning opportunities for students. Recognizing that an unbending interpretation of rules would not facilitate student learning, faculty would **articulate the reason** for expectations, **make moderate adjustments** to enable youth to continue learning, and highlight the **importance in college** of navigating these challenges.

"In a system in which being academic or scholarly is about being closer to something foreign to you, schooling becomes training for not knowing or valuing self." – Chris Emdin, [Ratchetdemic](#) (2021)

Challenge Identified in Pilot:

Underserved youth often have neither seen their own options in future careers nor been able to practice for them.

LESSONS FROM PILOT: Exploring Careers

A goal of the New Paths to Career Success pilot was to make career preparation a part of postsecondary preparation for historically underserved youth. Notwithstanding efforts in high schools, many youth have limited exposure to the array of postsecondary options available. To make an educated decision youth needed opportunities to **acknowledge and explore their own experiences and skills** to see how these **align with current career opportunities**. Many students who have been underserved have had to focus high school on passing credits and exams, and have therefore had less opportunity than their peers to **practice skills** they will need in the workforce and to get into entry-level jobs.

APPROACHES OBSERVED IN PILOT

Faculty in the pilot adapted the curriculum to incorporate focus and reflection on careers. Two approaches observed in the pilot are highlighted in the ensuing pages:

- Help students explore themselves to explore the work
- Infuse explicit teaching of core job-entry skills



RATIONALE




When students can explore their own experience, skills, and interests in relation to future work, they are more engaged and interested in education for those careers.



When students have opportunities to practice skills they will need in the workforce, they become more confident and feel better prepared for future jobs.

Support students in knowing themselves better before selecting a career

For youth who want or need to have the financial stability of a job urgently, preparation for careers is critical. Their more privileged peers have often had more opportunity to explore their own interests and aspirations and finding connections to potential careers without that feeling of urgency. Academic exploration of careers can be a valuable moment to provide the same opportunity to all youth. It is critical in this time to help youth explore how their own interests and skills map onto possible and feasible jobs and careers.

 Exploring experience, skills, and interests helps youth engage with possible careers.

PROMISING PRACTICE FROM THE PILOT

Career Zone Worksheet

Developed by Anna Smith

Interests	Work Values
a.	a.
b.	b.
c.	c.
Jobs/Zones recommended based on my interests?	Jobs/Zones recommended values?

Speech-11 is a communications class. Like many college courses, the focus in the class is on the content and skills, not on the participants themselves. To help youth connect their own interests and skills to the careers the class could prepare them for, faculty infused self-exploration into the course. This bore similarities to efforts to create opportunities for youth to bring their own stories into the class, discussed earlier in this document, but now brought an explicit focus on career to those stories. In this adaptation, Anna Smith helped engaged learners using a web-based platform called Career Zone to explore careers and apply that knowledge using communication skills in a mock job interview. Youth were able to articulate career options aligned with their interest, strengths, values, and skills.

“Research on persistence indicates that college students are more likely to complete a program of study if they choose one that aligns with their interests and goals. But first-generation students, students of color, and students from low-income families may have limited ideas about... what study and work in particular fields consist of and how a career in a particular field might connect with their interests and aspirations.... An essential first step in helping students explore interests and connect with a program that is a good fit is to have conversations with them about what they are interested in, what they would like to do with their lives, and what they see as their strengths.”
— **Davis Jenkins and Hana Lahr**, *Community College Research Center* (2022)

Infuse explicit teaching of fundamental career readiness skills

A course on communications was offered in five of the six schools in the pilot for a reason: Communication is a fundamental skill not only for success in a variety of careers, but also for success gaining entry into those jobs in the first place. Since the pilot was focused on career pathways, it was a natural progression for professors to adapt communications assignments to apply to career: turning an informative speech into a presentation on one's job interests, a persuasive speech into job interview.



When students have opportunities to practice skills they will need in the workforce, they become more confident and prepared for future jobs.

PROMISING PRACTICE FROM PILOT

Mock Interview

Developed by Anna Smith

Directions: Your oral presentation assessment for Unit 3 will be in the form of a presentation graded on your **verbal communication and language**, as well as all aspects of your presentation. You will also be expected to demonstrate your knowledge of your chosen **industry** and your ability to make connections between your skills and the industry that you chose. **Interviews will take place during class on Tuesday, May 9th.**

Before your interview, you will:

- Select your industry of choice
- Review sample interview questions and brainstorm detailed responses
- Review a sample job description so you can incorporate specifics in your presentation

The Mock Interview assessment gave students the opportunity to apply what they learned about communication to an interview in the field they selected during career research. This project-based approach makes the communication principles come alive for students, helping them to practice and retain skills. At the same time, it prepares students for the workforce. The speeches thus had complementary purposes: students learned the technical skills for job interviews while practicing the fundamental skill of communication.

“HR leaders called out soft skills, such as work ethics, communications, teamwork, and leadership, as a barrier to finding talent for the most difficult to fill jobs in their organization. Although not traditionally the province of academic institutions, they could develop curricula or other resources to complement students’ learning in technical areas with the skills and habits necessary to thrive in a workplace. Soft skills are an area where post-secondary educators must consider providing remedial support in order to maximize their students’ prospects.” [Bridge The Gap: Rebuilding America’s Middle Skills](#), Harvard Business Review (2014)