

The Quest to Learn Community

Students and teachers sit at the heart of any school community. This chapter profiles the qualities of each, emphasizing the emergence of these qualities from a set of core values defining the school.

Quest to Learn Student Profile

Q2L's main goal is that every student who graduates will possess the knowledge, skills, and habits of mind necessary to succeed and contribute in the twenty-first-century global environment. In the attempt to define what students will know and do upon graduation, we considered not only content-based knowledge, but also those situated practices and literacies that students need to use this knowledge in a way that is meaningful to them. If students cannot act in and with the knowledge they gain in school, they cannot persist in crafting their own identities as independent learners. Q2L therefore strives to create the conditions where connections to everyday experience are celebrated, internalized, and demonstrated across all aspects of the school.

Q2L graduates will be prepared to engage in postsecondary education and lifelong learning in a rapidly changing global environment because of the attributes we strive to produce in them.

Academically Prepared

Each Q2L graduate will

- Be prepared for the requirements of matriculation for standard, postsecondary school experiences.
- Have earned a high school diploma with course credits sufficient for entry into any state's university system.
- Have mastered the content and practices necessary to engage successfully in postsecondary coursework and to complete a college degree or other postsecondary certification.
- Be proficient in a language other than English.

Able to Recognize and Recruit Different Ways of Knowing

Each Q2L graduate will

- Have experienced the world as a set of interconnected systems and learned strategies for acting within these systems in ways that are relevant and empowering.
- Have gained experience in achieving integrated expertise: researching, theorizing about, demonstrating, and revising new knowledge about the world and the systems of which it is composed. Graduates will be able to use this expertise within future contexts as demands require.
- Have mastered essential principles of game design in multiple contexts for multiple purposes.
- Have developed a way of thinking about global dynamics: how world economic, political, technological, environmental, and

social systems work and how they are interdependent across nations and regions.

Able to Recognize and Recruit a Range of Learning Practices

Each Q2L graduate will

- Recruit relevant ways of knowing for learning in particular contexts.
- Use models and simulations to understand and predict the behavior of systems, in math, science, geography, and computation.
- Use game design and system thinking as lenses through which to view society and culture as well as through which to express ideas and emotions.
- Reason and problem-solve as part of understanding the goals of a system; engage complex problems; collect, analyze, and synthesize information from a range of sources; tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty; and apply appropriate ways of knowing to produce potentially viable solutions.
- Recruit appropriate resources and practices essential to comprehend, analyze, evaluate, develop, and present information in an articulate, persuasive, and appropriate manner for specific purposes—through speech, with visual demonstrations, in writing, and through games and digital communication tools in a manner that demonstrates awareness of diverse points of reference.
- Be fluent in a range of technology practices—able to use essential computer and technological tools for communication, presentation, and data analysis and to adapt such skills to relevant technologies as they emerge.

- Consume games, media, arts, information, and technology with a critical perspective engaged and be able to evaluate sources of bias, validity, and scholarly integrity.
- Be intellectually curious and able to plan for, organize, and evaluate learning opportunities for lifelong learning.
- Be able to work in collaborative, cross-functional teams.
- Recognize his or her own areas of mastery and can contribute this knowledge toward work with others on complex, multidimensional problems.
- Think, read, and interact critically to solve complex problems in mathematical and scientific contexts.
- Express himself or herself persuasively through language and evidence-based reasoning.

Is an Engaged and Purposeful Citizen

Each Q2L graduate will

- Be a thoughtful, well-informed citizen who is able to take and value cultural perspectives other than his or her own to construct a multidimensional understanding of the natural world and human experience.
- Be a collaborative player who understands how to work and learn with individuals who hold varied points of view and who bring different resources to bear on the problem at hand.
- Be able to design play and other kinds of systems for a range of audiences, recognizing the need to choose appropriate language, behaviors, and strategies of interaction.
- Understand the factors influencing his or her personal health and wellness and be able to make informed choices to enhance his or her overall physical, mental, and emotional health.

- Demonstrate ethical decision-making skills and be able to make responsible choices for the benefit of himself or herself and others and for the development of a more just and peaceful world.

Student Resources

Students not only will develop these capacities within the curricular experiences of the school but will be supported in their development through internships, community service, service-learning opportunities, and capstone research projects, especially within the upper grades. The Q2L curriculum, combined with cocurricular and extracurricular support, develops the aforementioned abilities, capacities, and dispositions in students. In addition, it seeks to draw on the community resources within the neighborhood where it is located as well as on organizations throughout New York City and the world to enrich the curriculum and enhance students' learning experiences. The Institute of Play provides game design and development expertise for students and teachers and serves as a primary conduit to the professional game-development community. Student development over time is to be documented within multiple, overlapping systems, including an online social-network space (Being Me) and annual portfolios.

Student Support Structures

Students' social, physical, cognitive, and emotional development are always a consideration in developing daily curriculum

and are explicitly addressed in student support structures. These structures include an ongoing advisory program in which all staff support students in developing strategies to manage their identities as students, peers, and young people. Students open and close each day with a small advisory group known as Home Base, which is led by a teacher. Home Base lasts 10 to 15 minutes and provides opportunities for students and teachers to come together to deal with the daily concerns of adolescents before these concerns become more serious issues for students. Advisory groups are small—10 students to 1 teacher—and thus create opportunities for teachers to develop strong mentoring relationships with students. Because the groups are small, teachers are responsible for monitoring academic or behavioral issues that arise, referring students on an as-needed basis to a student support team most likely consisting of a counselor, intervention specialist, other Q2L teachers, and administrators. The support team will determine together the appropriate interventions for individual students who are having problems that their teacher-adviser cannot handle alone.

Teachers

Q2L's experienced teachers share the school's vision for game-based learning and academic rigor. They have the desire to work collaboratively, the experience in doing so, and the capacity to integrate game design and systems-based content, issues, and perspectives with state standards. In addition, ongoing professional development is an integral part of teaching at Q2L. Faculty will continue to work with the Institute of Play to develop

curriculum and resources for use by the students and to create a learning environment in which students are supported in the design of curriculum for other students. Ninth-grade Q2L students, for example, may design games for use in the sixth-grade curriculum or by their own peers. In addition, throughout each semester teachers will participate in study groups, lesson study, and peer observation, and daily common planning time will allow for meaningful collaboration.

Flexible scheduling enables teachers to work in teams to collaborate on the design of an integrated curriculum. Longer instructional periods (75 to 90 minutes) make in-depth projects and experiences possible. Thematic curriculum fosters cross-discipline connections and facilitates the development of critical thinking, making, and reasoning skills. Smaller class size (25 students) enables students to develop strong relationships with school staff and gives teachers the opportunity to create varied and differentiated learning opportunities. An instructional team of teachers and administrators also supports the faculty in differentiating instruction to meet the needs of English-language learners and special-education students. This team shares strategies and resources with all staff and helps teachers to modify instruction based on students' individual needs.

Profile of a Quest to Learn Teacher

Student success at Q2L depends greatly on the teachers we hire. Our teachers help shape and sustain the school's vision, mentor and support the students in their learning, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the opportunities and challenges of

a game-based learning model. As such, we have developed a teacher profile that offers both a vision and a standard toward which each Q2L staff member can pursue his or her own goals as a teacher and a researcher and create professional development plans to meet these goals. We expect our teachers, like our students, to have areas of strength and weakness as well as areas of growth and interest to which they are committed. As such, no teacher can meet all criteria of the profile, but there is an expectation that our teachers will continually work toward excellence and overall balance in the skills they bring through their practice.

In addition to meeting appropriate New York City DOE and New York State DOE licensure and certification requirements for subject and grade levels, teachers who join the Q2L learning community operate within a specific profile.

Fluent in Gamelike Approaches to Learning

A Q2L teacher

- Understands and engages in complex problems; collects, analyzes, and synthesizes information from a range of sources; tolerates ambiguity and uncertainty and supports students in pursuit of the same.
- Effectively models the essential skills of reading, writing, comprehending, analyzing, listening, speaking, and designing necessary for student learning.
- Sees himself or herself as a learner, writer, designer, reader, producer, student, and gamer.
- Creates contexts with and for students to connect to relevant resources in ways that strengthen the school's systems-based focus.

- Is committed to creating situated-learning experiences for the students.
- Is an innovative, systems-oriented thinker who models thinking and reasoning practices for students within evidence-based contexts.
- Is an integrative and effective user of games, models, and simulations.
- Is enthusiastic about working in a collaborative-learning community where teachers are empowered to take on multiple roles, including leadership and administrative roles.

Youth Focused

A Q2L teacher is

- Committed to student development and the success of all students.
- Responsive to feedback and able to modify methods to ensure the effectiveness of the learning environment for students on an ongoing basis.
- An excellent communicator, listener, and mentor.
- Sensitive to diverse students' varied needs.
- Metareflective and able to recognize and act on the needs of individual students, colleagues, and the school community.
- An advisor and advocate for students.
- Able to evaluate, select, and use various forms of games, media, and technology in lesson design and implementation to maximize student learning.

Academically Prepared

A Q2L teacher

- Has a deep understanding of his or her own content expertise and can connect this expertise to that of others within applied-learning contexts.
- Is intellectually curious and possesses a commitment to life-long learning.
- Is fluent in use of technologies to communicate and work across time, space, and place to extend contexts for student learning.
- Continually models and creates opportunities for students to coengage in reflection on their own learning.
- Uses game design and systems-based learning to provide contexts for inquiry and discovery, leading students to engage actively in their own learning. Through this method, students actively analyze, manipulate, and evaluate information and media, construct knowledge, and solve complex problems in individual and collaborative settings.

Responsible, Civically Engaged, Ethical

A Q2L teacher is

- Committed to behaving ethically toward all members of the learning community.
- Responsible in the decisions he or she makes that affect the learning community and has an understanding of the potential outcomes of these decisions on local, national, and global levels.
- Able to model forms of civic engagement for students that demonstrate an understanding of the role that individual voices and communities can play in shaping the quality and value of life.
- Responsible and committed to helping each student achieve excellence.

- Receptive to others' perspectives; welcoming of differences in interpretation and judgment; and able to revise and expand his or her own views.
- A dedicated member of the Q2L professional community and participates in ongoing professional development, including lesson study, peer review and mentoring, study pods, and networking with teachers locally, nationally, and internationally.