

Post Institute Reflection

The draw for me to Discovering Community was in the description that was handed out to teachers by Nancy Cornell. That write-up mentioned that this was a course that allowed kids and teachers to create documentaries. Not just documentaries, but stories that related directly to their lives and the communities that they lived in. I have passion for integrating video into my classroom. I have attended countless workshops and courses on shooting, editing, and generally working with video with children. My concern has always been that the video projects I learned about were not authentic or connected anyway to curriculum. This course was different. It provided an opportunity for me to learn how to meaningfully use video in a classroom. It offered academic integrity.

Though my expertise is in video and technology integration in my sixth grade class I have done most of my work in isolation with my students. I consider myself an outgoing person, but when I was asked to travel to Neat Repeats to conduct an interview my heart skipped a beat or two. I had real trouble wrapping myself around this challenge. I felt like I was wasting their time because I had no authentic reason for interviewing them. How wrong I was! The interview was an amazing experience. For me it was the climax of the week.

I walked into Neat Repeats and I thought about everything I learned from watching Greg interview Michele Forman. I was prepared to use my active listening skills. I was going to use eye contact, frequent nods, pauses that prompt a person to give more, encouraging prompts such as Uh huh, and the ever popular open ended questions. I was prepared to meet Diane to learn about Neat Repeats and their non-profit operation.

Thank goodness Diane created a comfortable space to conduct the interview. In the backroom of Neat Repeats was where we sat down. I could not imagine conducting an in-depth interview leaning against a rack of used clothes. The distractions would have been too much and I am sure the interview would not have been as fruitful. The interview was very insightful. I personally had never been to a store that sells gently worn clothing. That is code for "USED". Regardless what I think of their clothing their mission is without a doubt amazing. Often times "non-profit" operations spend a tremendous amount of their money on operating expenses. At times only a

minimal amount of money makes it back to “the cause”. Neat Repeats was certainly different. They have only three part time paid employees. There are fifty volunteers that run the store. That certainly frees up a tremendous amount of money to go back into Addison County. Last year Neat Repeats donated over 100,000 dollars to causes around Addison County. Amazing!!! I will finish my thoughts about the interview by saying it is very difficult to conduct an interview and take notes at the same time. If I were to conduct that interview again I would definitely use a recording device.

As the week progressed I had an opportunity to broaden my skills in one of three areas. I had a choice to learn about video, photography, or audio. Since I feel very comfortable shooting and editing video, and some what experienced in editing sound files I decided to learn more about shooting photos. I take a ton of pictures every year. Of the countless photos I take zero are taken with any sort of thought into composition. Ned was terrific at explaining composition, distance and lighting. I was able to put those new ideas to the test at Monument Farms. Overall my photos showed growth on my part and that was a real bonus for me with this class.

I want to take a moment to thank you and Ned for being flexible enough to allow us to use the editing software that best matches what our classrooms have. Ned’s experience is in photography, but not necessarily understanding what it takes to get software loaded onto classroom computers by school technologists. Open source or not, technologists are not always willing to install software onto computers. With a little gentle encouragement from me Ned agreed to let me edit and present my photos using Photostory 3 for Windows. This is the software Addison Northeast primarily uses.

So where do I go from here? All week long I made a running list of ideas on how to use what I learned with my class. My ideas ranged from extremely ambitious to manageable. After consulting with the other teachers from Monkton I was persuaded to start small and grow from our first experience. Our project is to have our students create personal documentaries on themselves and/or their families. What is their family’s story? I plan to create my own story as an intro and from there I hope to open their minds to the unique stories their families have. We will jointly share our projects with our school throughout the year. The early plan is to primarily use photos and audio. I may expand that idea to include video for my class. I imagine kids will become excited by this first project. I plan to allow them

to dictate the next steps. Putting it in the hands of my students means they will put more into the future project(s).