

POST INSTITUTE REFLECTION

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If I had taken this class a few years ago I would have left it feeling completely overwhelmed and inadequate. As it stands, here in June 2009, it is the perfect next step. If my professional development was stone path, the project we will undertake thanks to this class would be the next stone-smooth, wide and welcoming to my bare foot.

However, this next step will require a big leap! It will require me to put more faith in my students, my community and my self as a “guide” than I have ever done before. While I have done community based projects, I have always orchestrated them so as to never really loose my teacher control. They were really planned units that incorporated community members. While I never knew what my class’ experience with a local taxidermist or an 88 year-old former school teacher would be, I always entered the unit thinking I knew pretty much where we were headed. The kids were never the ones deciding with whom we should speak what our focus should be.

I am excited and nervous about letting the kids take the helm. I recognize that I will still be the guide and that I will enter the project with specific curricular goals. Still , it is a challenge **not** to try to iron out all the glitches, make all the contacts, problem solve the logistics, think of a great project plan, make a time line, etc. etc. before the kids come to school. Despite all this anxiety I know with certainty that if I can let the kids take the helm it is going to propel them. I look forward to the energy that will result in me saying to my eight and nine year-old students, “Sounds great, how are you going to pull this off?” or “So who is going to call the town clerk?” or “Who should we interview about that?” I have probably asked questions like this before but in the past I only asked them to create an illusion of choice and an illusion of empowerment. This time, I do not plan on already having all the answers ahead of time. I hope that the kids pick up on the authenticity of this proposition.

Not only will kids be making real decisions about their learning. They will also be given a microphone and an audience (via class blog site) to share their thoughts about the process along the way. Goodbye to my

control over the class newsletter! My euphemistic summaries of a boring field trip or a hectic week will be replaced with the scoop from the students' perspectives.

I am grateful for the institute for helping me take this next step. Student directed projects and the use of technology as a tool for sharing authentic work are two of my professional goals. I think that the course made both of these goals more accessible for many reasons. For one, having real teachers share their experiences with implementing community projects made this work seem invaluable and possible. I appreciated their honesty and their ability to keep kids in the forefront of their work at all times. Secondly, having the opportunity to conduct an ethnographic study and produce a audio project allowed me to reach my own conclusions about the value of those processes. Interviewing community members was exhilarating and a truly reciprocal meaning making endeavor! Likewise, learning audio technology by using audio technology to represent an experience I really cared about helped me see the technology as a tool as opposed to an "extra" piece of the curriculum.

Equally valuable to my learning was the caring, relaxed and energy filled culture of the institute. The content and the process of the institute will inform my teaching for years to come! Once my class implement this project this fall, my next goal will be to find routine ways to ensure student directed learning and the use of technology to share student voice throughout this school year and beyond.

Teacher teaching teachers

Authentic experience

Reciprocal relationship between interviewer and interviewee