

Discovering Community Reflections
Summer 2009
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I came to this class excited and energized. I hoped that it would help me to finally use my technical skills with my students in a meaningful way. Personally, I enthusiastically embrace technology and I am expected to teach my students how to use it, however, I have often struggled to find ways to smoothly incorporate technology into my curriculum. I'm also very interested in community and Place Based Education. This class seemed like an ideal way for me to develop a plan for combining my interests in community and documentary work with my students.

As the class began, learning more about ethnography and the ways to get to know people through the interviewing process was really inspiring. I loved being part of the audience. Next came the "deep hang" and that was a less comfortable experience. I approached our first interview with trepidation. Although I have participated in hundreds of professional interviews, I was usually tucked safely behind my camera. The idea of being face to face with Robin, of The Round Robin, without the security of a camera was intimidating. Of course, she is such a wonderful and easy person to talk with that my fear dissipated quickly. I left that situation with warm feelings for having met a very sweet new person.

Next was the chance to dabble with the technology. I was looking forward to the hands on activity this would entail and thought I would choose to practice more video production. I was surprised to feel myself drawn to audio instead, mostly, I think, because of Erica's obvious passion and energy for the process. I was not disappointed. I thoroughly enjoyed learning to use these new tools and could easily imagine transferring this learning to experiences I could create with my students.

The technology came easily to me however; the interviewing process still seemed difficult. I believe this was in part because I was interviewing children. I felt a great responsibility to give back to the children I was talking with. As a result, I answered their questions and let them play with the audio equipment as much as I asked questions of them. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience but felt it would have been easier to compile a

cohesive, informative piece of audio if I had been sitting at the table with the adults. In the end though, I was very content with what I was able to produce.

As is typical for me, I found inspiration in the presentations from other teachers. I was in awe of what Kate and Gene had accomplished with their students. Again, I was moved by their passion and energy. They both were so thoughtful and caring about their students and their larger community. While I was impressed by what they had accomplished with their students, I was also wondering what a comparable project would look like with younger kids. I think it was David who shared a graphic of developmentally appropriate focuses for children...I kept referring to that image in the back of my mind. I wanted to develop a project that would be most meaningful to elementary aged children.

Meeting with my Monkton Central School colleagues I found that we had similar ideas about how to use what we had learned with our own students. Although we started with very big ideas, I felt strongly that the project be manageable in order to increase our chances of successful completion. Ultimately, we decided on a series of expanding projects that would grow larger. The image of Russian nesting dolls comes to mind; as the students' experience increased so would the breadth of the projects and the size of the audiences. I can envision these projects continuing to grow and perhaps even connecting with the high school in future years.

One of the best things about this class was that I took it with two colleagues from my school. Too often I take a class, get all excited and have grandiose plans only to lose steam when I get back to my own busy classroom and the inherent expectations of the administration. I feel that having a plan with two other teachers in the school will give us enough momentum and support to carry through with our vision. If any of us starts to get bogged down there will be colleagues there who can keep us moving or help us overcome obstacles. I feel confident that the projects we have planned will be exciting and challenging for my students and that we will be able to complete them successfully.