

Megan Sutton
Discovering Community
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Discovering community – the phrase presents a plethora of possibilities. That alliterative statement only begins to express how my thinking has expanded and my view has changed as a result of the Discovering Community course offered by Greg Sharrow of the Vermont Folklife Center in June of 2009. When I registered for the course, my understanding was that the course would provide the framework and tools to gather community stories as part of an educational experience. The initial paperwork indicated that the course would substantially exceed my previous expectation and the course itself blew that understanding out of the water!

Reflecting on what I experienced during the course, I can safely say that what I learned is almost immeasurable. Here are some phrases I have in my notes – phrases that will inform my thinking for a long time:

- power of story
- meaningful learning
- student voice
- developmentally appropriate curriculum
- ethnography as a way to understand the experience from the perspective of the person who had it (Sharrow)
- sustainable schools
- ethnographic inquiry leads to empathy
- service learning
- place based education.

These are not “my” phrases. Some are programs or schools of thought, while others are ways of looking at things that are already happening. The task that lies ahead for me is to digest these phrases, fill my understanding beyond my notes, do lots of reading and inquiry, and share my understanding with the teachers and staff in my school.

Reviewing the assignment for this piece, I have looked at the list of things we could consider when writing this reflection. At this point, I would say that it is impossible for me to identify any single person, idea, event, activity or conversation. Almost every aspect of the course has influenced my thinking as an individual and as an educator. It was especially valuable to hear from so many professionals, whether they

were educators or media professionals. For example, I found working with Erica Heilman to be an incredible experience. She was infinitely patient and very giving of her professional expertise. Her excitement for her field is palpable, and in turn infectious. I'm sure that I'm not alone in thinking it would be great to be a sound person (professional name?). With her support, our novice efforts sounded great and provided a totally satisfying experience.

If I have to choose one word to sum this reflection, I would say "thankful". I am thankful to have met Greg Sharrow, whose name I have seen on various educational pieces over the years. I am thankful to have been included in this great group of committed educators, including the guest lecturers. I am thankful to be part of a school district that is willing to support my further education. I am thankful to be part of Addison County and Vermont, a place rich with cultural and people resources, and a place that values community and the individual. Finally, I am thankful to be a student, in a position to learn new things and ideally, use my increased understanding to enhance the educational experience of others. Thank you for sharing your learning and experience with us - I'm ready to keep going!