

Discovering Community:
Students, Digital Media, and Place Based Learning

Reflection Paper



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As I stated at the start of the Institute, I have long been proponent of placed based, community centered learning, and a disciple of David Sobel. However, as a new teacher and long distance commuter, I have not had the time to design and implement a community centered project. This Institute renewed my enthusiasm and energy, gave me new tools, and the time to create a comprehensive and meaningful project for my incoming students.

I found every presenter to be inspiring. Each one was passionate about their work, able to articulate that this type of teaching was challenging (akin to shopping at a Farmer's Market) but possible, and full of pride and joy as they shared their successes. Kate Toland was a delight and made such a solid case for Student Centered Learning. Though her projects were at a much higher level than I teach, I could see the possibilities. I have always given kids as much choice as possible in reading and writing. After seeing Kate's work I am motivated to find even more opportunities for choice. Jean Berthiaume was equally inspiring. The work he has done is truly amazing and, once again, showed us that kids will dig much deeper and rise to new heights when they can work on something both of interest and real use. That notion of an authentic audience is so crucial in motivating kids to do good work.

All three media leaders were extremely creative and professional. I'm pretty "green" in all three areas and any would have been a rich learning experience for me. I landed in the photography group which proved to be a great place. Digital cameras are an available resource in our school so a photography project is the very feasible. As a result of Erica's group presentation and Ned's guidance in our group, I learned a lot of basics about creating a documentary regardless of the presentation media. I love the phrase "deep hang" and see that it is a vital part of the process. It was fun to "deep hang" with our group, hear the wide range of questions, and see everyone take a slightly different path in their exploration. This was all ultimately evident in the wide range of final projects that were presented. This was a bit eye-opening to see how 10 people could walk away from the same place and time with such different perspectives and choose to tell the story in such different ways, regardless of their experience with the media and production tools. I felt very lucky that we had the opportunity to return to the farm the second day and do some audio work and then to see how some participants choose to incorporate it. Though the "Mac Learning Curve" got in my way and slowed down my own work, I was able to appreciate the work of others and to see what's possible. Seeing and hearing all the project from the other groups and getting a sense of their process was rich with nuggets to inspire and show what was possible. When I work with my kids on this project I will collaborate with our Technology Educator and between the two of us

we will be able to open many doors and present many options to our students. We will start with a photography project and then do an audio project to build and master skills in the documentary process and the media tools available to us. Our final project will combine the two and provide kids the opportunity to do some very self-directed and independent work.

As I read through my notes I was struck by the vast amount of ideas and resources that were shared. I have numerous notes about books and articles to read, web-sites to visit, and some “catch phrases” to guide my work.

- Worthwhile Residue
- Deep Hang
- Service learning is not community service
- Ethnography
- Who are your local heroes?
- Public education is the stewardship of democracy
- Failure has a role in education. If we reflect failure provides learning.
- People don't want to *work* to watch something
- Question the world that is
- Culture assigns meaning (such as what “flipping someone the bird” means)
- Digital stitches
- Careful listening
- Silence is OK. The interview is not about you.
- Knowledge of newest things should be acquired first

This course was rich with information and inspiration, delivered at a well timed pace, facilitated with grace and humor by, you, the passionate Greg Sharrow. I'm in some ways eager to get back to school so I can begin the work this course has set before me. I'm sure I will gain more and more insight and inspiration as I read the resources, visit the web sites, and collaborate with other teachers in my school who also participated in this course. Thank you for making this one to the most enjoyable and useful courses I have taken.