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Discovering Community Reflection Paper:

How do I write this reflection... as an essay with a thesis about how meaningful this class has been to my personal and professional growth or as a dialogue, as pure as the ethnographer's deep listening would require. I will attempt to do both in this reflective piece and write it like I would say it over a cup of tea Greg, on a sunny, warm afternoon by the riverside.

This class has been personal narrative therapy; it has allowed tremendous healing over the untimely death of my 41 year old brother Roger. My recognition of the importance of our life story had begun before this class. Sharing stories about my brother over the week of his funeral began my true understanding of the life giving power of story, but this class has given my knowledge shape, focus, meaning, structure, opportunity and permanence. As you said Greg, "we narrate ourselves into existence." Myerhoff's interesting account of meeting, visiting and telling the story of the elderly Jewish community who lived the shtetl lifestyle of old eastern Europe is a poignant lesson about how we all want to be remembered. We want to tell our story. Your loving piece about your mother, reiterates the importance of the person being able to TELL his/her own story and have the deep listener, not judge that knowledge, but to appreciate it as that personal voice and understanding and thus truth for the narrator. I never sat with Roger and had an interview, so he will live in my telling his story to others. The legacy of the story is enduring in our hearts, but also in the technical capabilities of digital media. I worked to make a video story of Roger's life in the days following his death. I did not know how to scan, edit or finish the product. I learned by doing and with the help of a more tech savvy friend and the Kinkos staff in Manchester, New Hampshire. This was the hardest project I believe I have ever done, but it now chronicles his life. Through the digital image, others can ask questions and we can keep telling his story.

This class gave me the chance to learn more intentionally how to create a photo-story visual narrative of person and place. I am very pleased to have had the opportunity to create my own "Ken Burns" story of Monument Dairy Farms. As I said in class, I was inspired when signing up for this class

to live for a week the dream career I have imagined, if not teaching, of being a documentary maker. I learned to think like a photographer, to consider distance, lighting and what's in the frame. I saw Ned's passion for living through the eye of a photographer and the opportunity such a vision inspires for travel, like his to see the Vatican and reaction to Pope John Paul II's death. As he said, it gave him the motivation to stop what he was doing and go. I found pleasure in the first stage of the photographer's process of discovery and creation and then have taken pride in the sharing presentation phase of the final product. I practiced deep listening in the two days we visited Monument Farms and then the story came naturally. I personally connected with the space and asked Maggie, the caretaker of the calves, if we could name the baby born on Roger's death day his name. I was struck by Simons's discussion of the ritual of naming. It inspired one option for our first class activity in the unit plan, to tell your story of how you were named. I was moved by her student Veronica's statement, "In this Earth everybody has to have a name or they are no one" and how Simons could finish the thought with, "but once a name is bestowed they become someone." (84) Roger was someone and now the calf is named for him, it is a connection. Maggie shared that usually she does not name the calves. I recognize this tribute on one of my photo-story slides.

In the making of my final photo-story product, I struggled with, but came to learn Adobe Photo Shop and by doing, understood what it is in relation to the photo-story program. I realize technology is like language, if you don't use it, you lose it. I hope to make at least one more photo-story this summer so that I can better teach it to my students. I want to review Ned's comprehensive guide he gave us based on our questions, especially how to incorporate audio. With the help of a colleague I was able to add Joni Mitchell's song *The Circle Game* to my photo-story. I keep inadvertently singing this song in my head these past few weeks and certainly get choked up by the way she sings of time moving in its circular balance of life and death. My personal musing on such deep subjects like life and death resonated in the prayer at the start of the Myerhoff article. "Man is like a breath, His days a fleeting shadow. In the morning he flourishes and grows up like grass, In the evening he is cut down and withers. So teach us to number our days, That we may get us a heart of wisdom."(1) I have shared my video photo-story with my family and friends and am very proud of the work. It pulled everything that was impacting me, my grief, my creativity, my need for connection, into a lasting monument.

Professionally, the exceptional group of colleagues I had the pleasure of spending time with over the Institute week engaged me and allowed for exploration into my historical discipline at a more earthy, grass-roots level. This exploration has led to a comprehensive expansion of the Being An Historian unit we have done for many years with our tenth grade U.S History students. As our unit plan references, instead of only interacting with our Greenwood Cemetery, students will have an opportunity to visit sites in their own town and connect with town clerks and historical society members to learn more. I have always dreamed of engaging with my community in the hands-on ethnographic approach to study history and government, but needed the guidance to make the dream a reality. Previously, I had reached out to the community in various aspects of instruction, but our projected integration of ethnography into our entire year long U.S History class is the level of community interaction I have aspired to achieve.

In the past, I also felt overwhelmed by the amount of time and energy it would take to organize such a comprehensive hands-on curriculum, but now, because of this class, recognize all of the valuable resources I have to help me achieve this goal. As David Sobel indicated, the amount of time required for such learning may feel conflicting to the teacher expected to cover so much content, but I embrace our plan to invest more instructional time. Our honesty that this deep investigative learning unit will take at least 6 weeks and perhaps 9 weeks will definitely be worth the smiles of my engaged students this year.

This class has opened my eyes to ethnography, folklore tradition and true discovery place-based learning. All are amazing new and exciting techniques for me that I plan to integrate in the U.S History course. The ethnographic approach to understand ourselves through our community is both enlightening and inspiring. The art of the interview gets at the heart of it all. Watching Michelle Foreman's story "unfold", and sharing in your own great interest and surprise in the unexpected places the interview went was great. The organic, serendipitous nature of the ethnographic interview is such a simple way to pull out gems of information. By training I am a historian. I got my Masters in History at UVM and have always thought and taught like a historian. As Jackson states when he clearly distinguishes the folklorist from the historian, "the student of history is largely dependent on documents...the student of folklore is primarily dependent on the performances-on stories..." (64)

Typically I am only comfortable in teaching or interviewing when I know all the background information, do all the research and tailor my questions to compliment my new knowledge, just as the reading describes the oral historian. As a matter of fact, a neighbor who was General Patton's driver in the Battle of the Bulge has indicated over the years he would love to talk with me about this experience. My husband brought me a book about this battle that this neighbor said featured his battalion. I felt I had to read it before the interview. I have seen him since I completed the book, and with pride told him I had read it and knew what to ask. We did not have time to talk on this day, but he gave me another book and I felt compelled again to read it. However, from this class, I feel liberated by the folklorist interview style. I realize and embrace the adventure it is to discover what you may have had no idea you were going to encounter. This is exciting. I can't wait to do this long anticipated interview in this new style, remembering what Jackson also said, "For the historian, the content of the statement is what matters most; for the folklorist, the content matters but so does the statement itself."

Obviously as Jackson points out, you go into the interview with a purpose rather than "shotgun collecting", but that should not forgo the other information offered. He stresses that shutting the recorder off and then turning it on after something about your topic is discussed makes the interviewee less natural, in an already artificial environment. Jackson gives his own personal experience of the origin of his book The Thief's Primer. He did not intend to write the account, but had such a vast treasure trove from one inmate it brought him to this expose'. Your point about people wondering what the conclusion was in your doctoral work and them not really getting that your role as an ethnographer is not to define truth, but to refine understanding was beyond some of your questioner's understanding. Perhaps, I would have been one of those to ask, "what's the point you are making," as I habitually always try to clarify or make a point about the information I give. As a history teacher, I try to have students detect historical patterns, in this way I often, as Ives references, take the narrative out of the context and perhaps mislead my students to see the part as the whole. I seem to fulfill what Schager references as the innate human desire to make shared classification because it is the root of social communication. He also talks about the contrived nature of an interview, which highlights the potential to disconnect, "This increasing distance of the material from its original place in the flow of human activity is a paradox inherent in all efforts to document culture." In this process, oral historians make a synthetic

rather than organic narrative. It is clear that focusing on individual anecdotes reveals more incongruity at times, because of the unique perspective of both the interviewee and interviewer, but it is real, it is alive. I am struck by the tension in the relationship of folklore and history and recognize both are grounded in experience, even if it seems what each researcher values is different. “Experience is pulled towards the universal and grounded by the particular: it is mythic and historical at once.” (Schager 95) The historian works often in the world of abstract concepts, while the folklorist is in the world of concrete and real. I find myself trying to teach all I am suppose to in abstraction and with far away examples in both time and place. As Ives, said, “The past,echoing in the present reverberates in the future.” (6) Nothing will reverberate if students don’t see relevance to themselves and concrete meaningful experiences.

Ives clarifies that “since the past exists only in one’s mind, it exists only in the present—a conglomerate of electrochemical impulses. History, then, never was; it only is.”(5) The dynamic focus on the present is what both myself and my students have been craving to make history truly ALIVE. This way of thinking flows into my personal growth, as I come to embrace that my brother Roger will always live in the sharing of his story with his children and others. As you will see in the unit plan, recognition and application of history being alive is our enduring understanding of the Being An Historian unit, but also for the entire course. We are inspired to make our entire class inquiry and place- based. As Kate said, to leave “worthy residue.” For such life long understanding, students must experience what they learn, to find out for themselves what makes a community sustain. I have also been led astray in my thinking of the idea of exotic. Unfortunately, I was thinking like the anthropologist in Samoa, rather than looking out my own front door for the countless possibilities of relevant outreach. As David Sobel stated and you reiterated, start from what is most local and real and work outward. The visit to various sites on the second day of class was a great immersion into our community. Most importantly to my growth it was a revelation that culture is EVERYWHERE. I sort of feel like DUH... now. Hearing my colleagues talk about the culture of G. Stone Motors or Round Robin, opened my eyes to the countless possibilities of discovering culture in our community. It also reveals that one doesn’t have to get stressed about traveling to the exotic...but as you said “we are all exotic.” I am struck by David Sobel’s reference to Bill Bigelow’s “How Schooling Taught Me Contempt for the Earth,” especially the quote, “We actively learned to **not-think** about the earth, about the place where we were. We could have been

anywhere or nowhere.” Students lacking connection to what they learn are frustrated and may show it in a variety of inappropriate ways. I want to break through the wall we have built for them. They want to connect as their infatuation with texting, cell phones and face book attest. I want them to see something new in what they may see everyday; to experience the fresh insight of a new observer.

My own visit with Jan Albers was enlightening. Initially, I did not want to go because I felt I knew about the Sheldon Museum, as I had taken a class ten years ago offered by UVM and based at this location. I had actually met you in a brief visit/workshop you gave our class. It is again a reminder, like the yearly fieldtrips I have provided for students to help them discover the richness of the history in our area, unless the lesson is integrated rather than a one shot deal, it sort of falls flat in the overall potential for learning. I certainly did not understand ethnography and folklore from this workshop. It took this week long immersion to get it. Hopefully, we will practice such immersion in discovering community in our U.S History course, and deep learning will happened. So on this visit day I wanted to visit a place I had no pre-existing knowledge. In the organic nature of selecting sites we ended up with the Sheldon Museum and Scott was very excited because he knew nothing about the museum, but noted the sign for it that morning on his drive into Middlebury and thought he would like to go. I knew we would have fun regardless of my previous knowledge. This visit was a great lesson in how to look at what you have previously seen with fresh eyes. It taught me how things change over time and how every experience is new, especially when you are intentional in your observation. To make the connection with Jan and her authorship of Hands on the Land was invigorating. It was exciting to see how the museum was stretching itself to be more approachable and accessible. It reinforces the history alive notion, that to see how to sustain for the future, one must focus on the present, even and perhaps most especially when talking about the past. This was the inspiration for the second day town green, historical house on main street activity in our unit plan.

David Sobel’s article on mapmaking was also an inspiration for the town green activity. As noted in the unit plan, the students’ will draw the town in their mind, following it up with a visit and a new map drawing, and then analyze the reasons for the different drawings. Making our community the classroom is so exciting to think about and plan. Matt Dubel from the Shelburne Museum was inspiring in the power of using education for our

sustainability. True appreciation for sustainability can only come through a deep value of one's sense of place. I teach because I am passionate and incredibly interested about the past, but more importantly I want to inspire in the present to make our world a better place for our future. Improving one's quality of life is so personal and such a natural part of civic engagement. Matt talked about kids being innately driven to "make the world right" and when they are not empowered to do so in the classroom they may become cynical. When I hear such cynicism or hopeless helplessness from my students about the way the world is, I have felt discouraged. Now, I feel like I have a clear roadmap for changing the way I teach to hopefully take these attitudes and transform them so that students will become agents of positive change. As I referenced in the class, I do a service learning project with my senior government students. It truly is service learning rather than community service because it is integrated rather than added on as a one time only opportunity. Now I feel, "Why am I waiting until they are seniors to give them such a rich learning experience?" Why not make that the basis of the 10th grade curriculum as well. Then imagine what can be done with this earlier experience when they are seniors. As I have mentioned, we want to change the teaching/learning approach for the entire year, not just this first discovery unit of Being An Historian. I look forward to planning with my colleagues how to tease out of the final products or any aspect of their learning in this unit to be the basis of their final course assessment in June. For example if a group of students meet with Larry Giles and Donald Lathrop, who are referenced in the resource list, to discuss the Greenwood Cemetery history, perhaps they will want to become active stewards of the graveyard as a final end of the year project. The possibilities I have come to appreciate are limitless. The pattern of learning that Kate Tolland references and the participant/observer/questioner requires, of listening, validating, authorizing, acting and reflecting, is such a powerful cycle for learning. I was reflecting on my notes from the Jean Berthiame workshop when he laid out the 3 legged stool of academic integrity, student ownership and apprentice citizenship. I drew a figure eight around the integrity and student and academic and ownership. These concepts are so intertwined.

Teaching the whole student is what is important, not the social studies student. The type of teaching, learning and connecting this class has inspired will bring out the true passions in my students. When Michelle Forman spoke of her inspiration from reading, it speaks to the true sign of learning, "when students connect the imagination to the real world." When, as you noted, the true meaning of passion is when time no longer has

meaning. This past year the clock hanging in my class room fell down and broke. A student made the comment that my classroom looked so different without it. I took it as a tongue and cheek comment about how she would now be unable to know what time class was over without the clock. I want to break down the classroom confines of time and space and inspire passionate learners. The vox populi we did of you Greg, was very telling in how many times one of us said passionate. This is you, this is me, this is hopefully the students of U.S History A& B for the 2009-2010 school year.

Thank you Greg for this visit and the learning I just gained from putting it all into words. I am so grateful for your inspiration to transform and glean all of the knowledge our community voices have to share, if we choose to deeply listen.

Indebted,

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