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ACCEPTANCE THROUGH ART AND TECHNOLOGY:  
LEARNING, LINKING, AND CREATING WAVES IN THE WORLD FROM THE  
ROOT OF PERSONAL CULTURE

By

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B.S. Elementary Ed., Montana State University-Billings, Billings, MT, 1998

Professional Paper

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As an educator, my role is not only to teach academia, but to also create lessons that encourage personal growth. My goal is to help my students find a new interest or perspective on life, and gain greater self-awareness and appreciation.

Initially the objective of my final creative project was to introduce the art form of photography and have my students explore and document personal culture. My students used epals.com to exchange their photographs with students from other countries to make cultural connections. I wanted this electronic exchange to exhibit differences and similarities my students shared with students across the world. Though challenges presented themselves, I forged on, searching for new experiences that proved to teach deeper understandings. What started as a cultural diversity project, metamorphosized into a series of social tolerance and self-discovery exercises. The cultural lessons became the vehicle that taught the power of meta-cognition, empathy, self-expression, self-awareness, and self-esteem.

My students inspired me by giving me hope and assurance that stepping outside the traditional box of teaching would produce results far beyond the expected. My two years with the Creative Pulse gave me the courage to dig deep, for the meaning of the material. I was empowered by the opportunities I created for my students and inspired to push my limits as a teacher. Through reflective writing and meta-cognition I have gained an understanding of the personal and professional growth that has altered me throughout the Creative Pulse Journey and forever enhanced my teaching style.

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION

*The information in this section briefly describes my personal growth that led to an idea for laying the groundwork required to prepare my students for this journey.  
(Pseudo-names have been created to protect the identity of my students.)*

## I. ROOTS

I teach in order to make a difference in this world. I want to help those who are not as fortunate as myself. Rather than feeding others, I want to teach them to fish. But, what gift do I have to share that would be equivalent to teaching them fishing? I have an art interest in photography and possess a rather large empathetic heart. My frustration with my students, society, and occasionally myself, is insensitivity and lack of tolerance for others. Cultural and religious intolerance, or just plain intolerance of another human being for any reason, has always frustrated me. During my ten years of teaching at the junior high level and my lifetime of living in a small town, I used to make the excuse, "That's just the way kids are," or "It's human nature." I began to wonder how I could teach my students to be tolerant humans in today's struggling society. I needed to combine my interests and my frustrations to teach my students a lifelong lesson - I had to try.

"What is your culture?" posed the late University of Montana professor Dr. James Kriley, my first week of embarking upon the Creative Pulse journey. I had two thoughts: 1) Where is he going with this? 2) How do I accurately define my culture?

Although every person's culture is unique to him or her, doesn't culture have some type of webbed connection to every living human? After a small group discussion and much contemplation, I began my weekly assignment of writing how my own personal culture had formed my behaviors and perceptions. My culture consists of the traditions, beliefs, and memories that make me who I am. I am striving to become a better person; my perceptions continually evolve based on new experiences, as well as my openness and acceptance of differing cultural practices. I continued pondering my own culture and always found myself reflecting on Dr. Kriley's "Frames of Mind" discussions.

Dr. Kriley emphasized an invaluable lesson when discussing frames of mind: how one perceives life and deals with crisis or new situations. Dr. Kriley supported the idea that a bad situation could be a positive experience. All one

had to do was change his/her 'frame of mind' from thinking negatively to viewing the crisis as an opportunity. What if I could show my students the power of changing their perceptions? But how?

During the Creative Pulse week of technology, University of Montana's Rick Hughes stretched our minds by posing this assignment: *With no limitations create a lesson that is creative and utilizes technology.* I wanted to contrive a lesson that had personal investment, creativity, and engagement for my students. After contemplating issues out of my control -- student perception and intolerance -- I chose a cultural exposure lesson. I had two requirements: Keep my students safe and be reasonable in terms of cost and parental permission. My lesson plan was to create a highly technical box that simulated another country's/culture's environment; it would allow my students to enter the new culture and a time warp at the same time, somewhat science fictional. The students would inhabit a world where they would live, breathe, eat and experience a different culture.

I wished I had the money to send each of my students' to another country/culture — to exist in another world. I wanted them to fully understand their luxuries and view their worlds with a new perspective. I also knew my lesson plan I created for Hugh's class was not realistic, but what if I used Dr. Kriley's frame of mind and looked at the situation as an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of my students? When choosing my final professional paper topic, I kept returning to Dr. Kriley's idea of changing my frame of mind and my personal sensitivity to injustices in the world. I knew I could alter my students' perceptions if I could create lessons for them in which they experienced cognitive dissonance and thereby had to find new lenses to look through.

Through my Pulse classroom experiences confronting and exposing my fears, I learned the value of establishing student experience through creativity and expression. When I began preparation for my second year final creative project I wanted to use it as a springboard for my final project. I combined a multimedia movie project that focused on different people's perspective of happiness and a dance I had created myself in University of Montana's Karen Kaufmann's movement class. The sole purpose of including the dance was to



make myself do something completely uncomfortable in front of a group of people; to put myself outside my comfort zone for deep, experiential learning to occur. I knew I would need to design a lesson for my students that created the same experience. This would broaden and deepen their learning experience far beyond the traditional methods of lecture, repetition, memorization, testing, and textbook.

I analyzed my students' strengths and interests to assist in the development of the unit. From my teaching experience I knew that junior high students are very much driven by their social world. They are curious creatures and love technology. With much of their world revolving around technology and my own personal interest in photography, I chose to use photography as a tool to allow my students to communicate their culture with students of other cultures over a monitored internet site.

Photography would be a new experience in the school setting. Although our school does not offer photography, students often bring cameras to school. I decided this could be an opportunity to expose my students to an art form they may not have considered as art. I was excited to share my interest in photography and recent educational insight with my students.

## II. AGENDA

I brainstormed ideas of how best to help my students welcome the larger world of cultural diversity. I wanted to pique my students' interests and let them discover the power of embracing other ways of life. I wanted them to explore and discover the world beyond their own circle.

I generated my action list for this project:

- find schools from across the world that would be interested in sharing their culture through photography and email
- create a safe emotional and experiential environment for my students
- invite a professional photographer to share expertise with my students
- create exploration lessons for my students that would help them discover both differences and similarities to their peers
- set aside class time for students to explore their photography skills and use photography to express themselves
- invite parents to take students on small group walks so students can photograph the culture of the town
- create exploration lessons for my students so they can reflect upon their own culture
- teach my students to use digital media to create a movie describing their culture
- connect my students with students from foreign countries through "epals" to provide a platform for cultural exchange and sharing
- teach my students meta-cognition

As a junior high teacher my main subject area is math. I teach four periods of math every day to two 7th grade classes and two 8th grade classes. I teach a health class two days a week during the first and third quarters. I instruct a reading class five days a week during the second and fourth quarters.

Due to flexible curriculum requirements, I was able to use my health class and intertwine my project into some of the reading class. I covered the following Montana state teaching standards mandated by the Office of Public Instruction,

students will:

- know and understand the role of the communication process
- demonstrate interpersonal communication skills
- understand the influence of cultural beliefs
- demonstrate communication skills, effective speaking and listening skills
- demonstrate respect of self and others

Although my teaching schedule added challenges, I felt confident of my path and destination with my agenda in hand. I was anxious to start a project that would give my students a new perspective and appreciation for the many kinds of people in this world. I was curious and excited about the knowledge and experience this exploration would provide for my students and myself.

My original plan was to establish a couple of in-class activities that allowed the students opportunities for self-discovery of their own culture. My students were to discover their differences and similarities to their peers. Once they discovered the meaning of culture, they were to take photos to represent their culture using digital cameras or a cellular phone. Using their photos they were to create a digital movie of their culture. They would also share their photos with students from other countries via epals.com. I hoped the sharing of photos electronically would open up new doors of interest, understanding, and acceptance of the world outside their own.

I planned to have my students and myself journal to gain insight. I felt written reflection would give me the best tools for documenting. Upon completion of each project, my students would reflect upon what new knowledge they gained from the activity. I would often ask what they learned about themselves and/or their peers. During the final reflection, I repeatedly inquired, *What was the purpose of the project?* I assigned this reflection writing as an in-class exercise so the students had adequate time to think and write during school.

I wanted my students to be able to openly discuss their opinions, and more importantly, to support their ideas. I felt they needed to learn to respectfully agree and disagree during a discussion--a skill which they hadn't previously exhibited.

Meta-cognition is one's ability to think about his/her thinking. Developing meta-cognition involves the processes of questioning, explaining, and evaluating. Basically one is learning to reflect to gain a deep understanding of the information (Hetland et al., 65). I utilized unrestricted journal writing (i.e. write about this lesson), reflective journal writing (specific questions for the students to reflect upon), class discussions, self-critiques, and peer-critiques in an attempt to teach my students to think meta-cognitively.

During Dr. Kriley's lecture series on Leadership he invited Kimberly Sheridan to share how critical art is as a component of the overall curriculum. Sheridan's team observed art classes and made connections between the integration of visual arts and education. Through this observation Sheridan and her colleagues created hard evidence proving the value of art in education known as the Eight Studio Habits of the Mind. This groundbreaking work was published in Studio Thinking. Hetland et al. lay claims to the power of meta-cognition witnessed within a classroom,

We saw open-ended questions that prompt students to reflect and explain aloud, or even silently to themselves, as evidence that teachers meant students to learn to Question and Explain. These kinds of questions help foster an inner voice of reflection... Students learn about themselves and their reactions and judgments as they evaluate work, whether their own or that of others (65).

I hoped that viewing the world through a camera lens, discovering and sharing their culture with epals, and creating a digital movie would bring about a new perspective from which my students could view the world. However, the original agenda did not bring about the understanding I wanted for my students.

The journey of this project was tremendously longer than I had originally anticipated. When the epals connection was not giving the breadth and depth I had hoped for I continued to search for projects that might create that depth of opportunity. I searched for that one project until I found an exercise that touched the hearts of all the students—Brown Eyes/Blue Eyes Project.

### III. CULTURAL TECHNOLOGICAL CONNECTIONS

Prior to the start of the school year, my first priority was finding classroom teachers in other countries who were interested in this idea of using photography to share culture. With research I found a reliable and safe internet site called epals.com.

Epals.com is a website that allows schools and students to connect with others from different countries through a safe and monitored system. As the teacher, all outgoing emails by my students were routed through me for approval before they were sent on to their epals. I also received all incoming emails from the foreign epals so I could block any inappropriate incoming emails between the students. I had to create a username and password and complete a profile form to be permitted to use the site. Epals.com required the location of my city, state, and country. I completed a form that others could access to determine what my needs were. I wrote:

My students are in the 8th grade and speak English. We live in a very rural area that lacks cultural awareness. We are looking to connect with students in all parts of the world to compare personal culture and the culture of their town/city/country. I would like to collaborate on a project in which students analyze their own culture and share photographs of their cultures. As a culminating project my students will utilize technology and create an imovie using the shared photos. I would like to begin correspondence the end of September or first part of October. I am very excited to open up my students' worlds to other cultures. We look forward to hearing from you.

I searched for prospective epals from August through February. Throughout the search I contacted an array of schools from the Middle East, Europe, Asia, Africa, Central America, and South America. We had commitments from France, Mexico, Bangladesh, and Turkey. Late in February I heard from Japan and Greece. Due to conflicting schedules correspondence with Mexico didn't work. Greece and Japan were too late to exchange pictures, but we were

able to correspond. France communicated for a short period of time and then rarely communicated; the students were fortunate to gain a few food photos. Bangladesh students wanted to communicate through the teacher; they sent a few photos, but the cultural connection was minimal due to only a couple of exchanged messages. The students were able to share a fair number of photos with their Turkey epals. I was satisfied with their correspondence. The students were eleven and twelve years old, a few years younger than my thirteen and fourteen year old 8th graders.

It was a continuous process checking my epals account for messages from any teachers and sorting through any incoming or outgoing student emails. It was an endearing process watching friendships emerge amongst the students. One of the Turkey epals was so anxious to have an American epal she wrote, "I love you" in her very first message. The students corresponded back and forth about school rules, personal interests, traditions, family, religion, holidays, music, clothing, favorite video games, and movies.

The core of my project revolved around the epal correspondence. With minimal photo exchange, the students were not gaining enough exposure to other cultures. This project was not allowing the students to develop any depth of understanding; I feared they would not understand the value of diversity and importance of acceptance. Because of this weakness I fervishly searched for activities to expose my students to these lessons.

#### IV. SETTING UP A SAFE, COMFORTABLE CLASSROOM ENVIRONMENT

When a teacher builds that belonging, she also removes threats, allows for students' brains to relax, their emotions to engage and learning to soar..... True belonging (team cohesion) allows people to feel empowered to step out and risk their comfort zone for success and learning (Deporter, Reardon, and Singer-Nourie, 36-37).

Setting up a safe and inviting environment for my students was a top priority at the beginning of the school year. I wanted my students to feel comfortable and to have a feeling of belonging. Since I only saw my students for forty-five minutes twice a week for health class, I knew I needed to take advantage of math class time to promote that bond and create the positive atmosphere that would lend itself to sharing personal information and feeling comfortable amongst peers.

Because my students come and go throughout the day, I felt it was essential to create the atmosphere of accepting differences and encouraging group work to appreciate each other as people. The culture inside my classroom should be no different than outside my classroom; accepting differences in others. I divided my students into groups so they were not with their friends, yet I knew I needed to create a feeling of community within my classroom to make students feel more comfortable around one another as well as to become part of a team. The ultimate goal was for the students to gain a sense of confidence and willingness to openly share and express themselves.

I started a peer learning project in my math class that would carry over that communal feeling into my other courses, health and reading. We started Math Survivor, a vehicle for teaching math or any subject founded by Coolmath Karen at [coolmath.com](http://coolmath.com).

Within the Math Survivor game my students had to agree upon a tribal name. They worked in groups on some assignments, earned points for the highest average on tests, and came together to review for tests. We held a review day before a test called "Re-Cap" day. On Re-Cap day the students wore

hats, which earned them tribal points. Other purposes of the hats included team morale, novelty, self-expression, and a chance to have fun in math class. There were other various activities that allowed the students to win tribal points. I would assemble games for assignments that would enable tribes to win points. And, if every tribal member turned in the monthly extra credit, points were awarded. A few times we had physical challenges that involved a relay race or sit-ups and push-ups to earn tribal points. At the end of the quarter, the tribal points were tallied up and one tribe won. I reassigned tribes quarterly so the students were exposed to different students. This allowed them to appreciate each person within the classroom.

Math Survivor was a fun vehicle to teach the students math. It also fostered positive relationships, which in turn aided in creating a feeling of belonging. After the teams were assembled and students began working together, bonds were formed. This improved student self-worth and acceptance of others despite differences.

#### PHOTOGRAPH OF RE-CAP DAY: CREATING A FEELING OF BELONGING





## PROJECTS AND STUDENT DISCOVERIES

*The following section contains descriptions of each of the classroom activities I engaged with my students. This chronological representation took place between September 2009-March 2010. It was my personal journey attempting to teach my students self-discovery, various forms of personal expression, acceptance and tolerance.*

## V. MUSIC AS PART OF OUR CULTURE

University of Montana's Ethnomusicologist, Dr. James Randall facilitated a lesson analyzing music with our Creative Pulse class. Dr. Randall asked the students to bring a music player with their choice of three songs that best represented themselves. He played the music while keeping the identity of the person a mystery. The remaining students made generalizations about the person in regards to personality, gender, politics, beliefs, etc. I felt this was a powerful tool for self-discovery as well as for exploring how other's taste in music reflects who they are.

My students are very connected with music. Thus, I wanted to use this exercise with them to accomplish two goals: 1. To get to know one another at the beginning of the school year and to begin to respect individual differences. 2. To have students articulate and make generalizations about each other in a respectful way.

Prior to beginning the project we discussed the appropriate way to make generalizations and responses. We discussed generalizations we might discover about one another: emotions, gender, personality, interests, political views, diversity, and perspective for the world. I modeled an appropriate, positive response regarding a random sampling of music. The students were very engaged. It took over two 45 minute class periods to share and discuss the music and ideas.

After the project I posed journal questions for the students to reflect upon. *How is music important in your life? How is music vital in other cultures? What do you think the purpose was of sharing your ipod music? What did you learn from this exercise?* I asked the students to record this in their reflection book. They shared the following thoughts about the importance of music:

- describes life
- helps convey emotions
- energizes
- entertains

- connects you to a memory of a person or experience
- is an integral part of how our country celebrates occurrences like holidays, sporting events, funerals, and weddings
- plays a vital role in religion

My students discovered the range of music their peers listened to and often it changed their perspective about another student. This created a unique opportunity for students to express themselves as well as accept one another's similarities and differences.

## VI. PAPER BAG PROJECT

The main objective of this project was for the students to look at their personal lives from a third person perspective. This activity encouraged my students to look at their own culture from the outside. It asked them to identify what people see externally as well as what they perceive, but cannot see. This is one of the first activities in which they began to think more critically about who they are and what they represent.

I gave each student a paper bag and explained the paper bag represented who he or she was. I assigned my students to find pictures from magazines that represented their outward appearance and paste them to the outside of the paper bag. Inside the bag the students placed pictures, quotes, objects or words that represented their values and beliefs. Every school year I assign this project to my students as an opportunity to express themselves in a fun and visual way. I have found this allows students to share private things about themselves in a safe way. The most important result of this exercise is that students are able to step outside their comfort zone and choose to share themselves.

My last objective was twofold: each student had to present his/her bag, and the audience had to exercise their discussion and commentation skills. The students would discover more about their peers' culture. I used this project as a presentation tool. Without any rules on discussion I began modeling responses and inquiries about the presentations toward the speaker and the audience. I asked questions like, *What do you feel is the most visible cultural aspect of you and why?* and *What is the significance of that picture?* I attempted to show my students how to ask questions that were not "yes," "no," or one word answers.

While each student presented, I asked the audience to journal about that classmate's culture and look for similarities between their peers. I ended the class period with the following assignment: "reflect upon what you learned about your classmates." The students found it easier to reflect on similarities. I discovered my continuing challenge was to help them see the power of diversity;

and how being different broadens their perspective affecting growth and a greater appreciation for themselves and the world around them.

### PHOTOGRAPHS OF PAPER BAG PRESENTATIONS

Students presenting their paper bag projects to the class.



## VII. CROSSING THE VALUES LINE

During a health class, I utilized Creative Pulse classmate Tanya Miller's diversity lesson for teaching values within my classroom. I was drawn to Miller's lesson, which engaged students by having them physically move and analyze their own personal values, a facet of their identity.

I created a checklist of values/morals that seemed applicable to my students and instructed them to check their five most important values (Appendix A). I created a visible line on the floor with yardsticks and had all the students stand on one side. The students then lined up. As I read each of the values one at a time, the students would cross the line stating their values. Then, I would have the students return to their starting location before reading the next value.

My objective of having the students choose their top five values on the checklist was for the students to self-analyze who they were and discover their culture. The students were forced to physically stand in front of their peers for what they believed in. The students felt safety in the activity because they were with their friends. But, when they crossed the line, they had to take a stand for what they believed in, which started moving the students out of their comfort zone. When they crossed the line for their individual beliefs, they observed their differences.

After the activity the students were to write about the purpose of the activity and record what they learned. There were some surprising discoveries about individual differences and how students viewed their values. One student, Kelly, explained in her journal that she was challenged to only choose five of the criteria off the list. The overall reflection of the students was the awareness raised by physically taking a stand for something in the presence of their peers.

Several students walked into class late, seeing only the physicality of the students crossing the line. I asked the latecomers to observe the activity and record what they saw. Lily reported:

I saw Mrs. Mehus calling out words like family, humor, popularity, etc. When she said a word people would step forward or stay

behind the line. They apparently were values and if they mattered to the kids. I guess some people really don't show these to other people 'cause I was surprised at certain times. Also I wonder if any lied because I'm POSITIVE that popularity matters to a lot of kids.

### CROSSING THE VALUES LINE PHOTOGRAPH



## VIII. PHOTOGRAPHY WITH LOCAL ARTIST MERY DONALD

I invited local photographer Mery Donald to share her expertise with photography. I wanted to find a photographer who could give artistic advice and photography tips to the students. Mery Donald not only connected with the students immediately, but also motivated them. She distributed handouts (Appendix B) and discussed her expertise before presenting a slide show of her work. The students were impressed with her work and were able to take her information and apply it immediately out in the field. I was excited about the follow-up my students have done with Mrs. Donald's work. They continued to check her website and update me with her latest photography shoots and cultural photos of her mission trip to the Philippines.

Their interest in photography and Mrs. Donald's work has shown me the value of exposing students to different realms around them. This has truly made them more aware of their surroundings and given them opportunities to explore new interests. I created various bulletin boards throughout the school year that showcased student photography (Appendix C). During the month of November I posted some of their cultural photos. During the month of February I had a contest for students to take a photo for the theme, "We love..." Each photo was posted with no indication of the photographer's identity. The students voted on their favorite photo exemplifying artistic presentation and their favorite for content or idea.

The student who won the artistic expression does not participate in extra curricular sports and struggles academically. She immediately took an interest in photography and checked out cameras frequently. As the school year progressed this student showed more and more interest in photography as an art form. Her exposure to this fostered artistic growth and allowed her to discover a talent. What excited me most about her winning was it confirmed her ability to be successful at something and feel good about herself. It opened a door of opportunity for personal expression and success that did not previously exist



(see photo below). This exercise gave me great hope for the potential of lessons like this to truly make a difference in the development of young adults.

Kianna's Winning Photo for "artistic presentation:"



Many of my students plan to continue with their photography skills and enter some of their work into the local 4-H fair competition. There were even a couple students who requested cameras for Christmas! I am excited to have exposed my students to a new art form and to have given a few students the thirst for knowledge and desire to continue with photography!

## IX. PHOTOGRAPHING OUR CULTURE

Before the next activity it was essential that my students had a good grasp of the principle components of their culture. I assigned the students to create a web of their cultural components. I felt a brainstorming web would be a freethinking activity that would encourage the students to organize their thoughts and define themselves without limitations. I had them brainstorm not only their personal culture but also their rural Montana community (Appendix D). The visual representation of the web provided them with a tool and context to walk into the community and take pictures that defined their culture.

After the engaging instruction from Mery Donald, parent volunteers assisted the students as they walked around the community using cameras and their new photography skills to capture details of their lives. I discussed the assignment with the parents, divided the students into small groups (about four students per adult); and we began our photographic journey. The students were excited to be outside exploring their world with a new appreciation for photography and a goal. I was pleased to see the results of their photography and to hear about their experiences of seeing their town in ways they had never noticed.

Upon returning, the parents were enthused to have been a part of their children's project. The students had fun taking photos, and celebrated with snacks. The next step of the journey was to begin creating our digital movies to represent our lives through photography.

STUDENT PHOTOGRAPHS:



Kelly, October 2010.



Tia, October 2010



Kianna, October 2010

## X. CREATION OF STUDENTS' PERSONAL DIGITAL MOVIE

To prepare my students for digital movie making I had them create a short movie in October. The assignment of their first digital movie was 8th grade school goals and photos of themselves. I presented their digital movies at parent teacher conferences held in November. I discovered my students had no experience in the creation of digital movies and limited understanding of how a movie is put together. It was a learning experience for all involved!

As a guideline I gave the students a rubric of how the project was going to be graded (Appendix E). We began the process of learning Mac's imovie program by diving in and exploring. Due to time constraints and computer availability it was not feasible to instruct students with a step-by-step procedure. The digital program on the school computers was an outdated imovie program, and there were different versions on varying computers. These two issues created a great deal of adversity. Due to the difficulties some students decided to use the movie-making program on their home computers.

With the lack of computer accessibility and confusion regarding the programs, I allowed the students to choose imovie or moviemaker for their digital movie. Understanding the assigned criteria they began their technology work. This part of the assignment required the students to utilize much of their own personal time because we did not have class access to the computer lab. This put a great deal of stress on my students and myself.

Upon completing the assignment, the students were anxious to present their work. The presentations and critiques of the project were equally important. I felt the presenter needed his/her time to shine and explain the work created, in addition to the job the peers had as viewers. This project reinforced the idea of being respectful to other students and learning to critique with positive remarks and helpful criticism. During each presentation I had half the class critique the digital movie so the presenter could gain feedback; but the value of the lesson was more for the editor to deepen their own questioning (Appendix F).

Because students' understanding of themselves is altered while they evaluate one another's work, it was essential to teach my students to be respectful, honest, and keep an open mind through the critiquing process. I guided my students through sample questions and responses: *What works? What doesn't work? What does this piece communicate? How did you choose the photographs you used in your project? What did your pictures represent? How did you choose the layout of your photographs? Why did you choose the accompanying music to your project? What would you do differently next time? What was your favorite part of your project?*

It was delightful to hear the students' inquisitiveness with meta-cognition as the backbone structure of the critiques. Although the questioning was similar amongst the audience participants, the widely used questions showed me they were thinking about the project and how best to respond in a respectful way. I was encouraged to hear the students giving constructive criticism in addition to the positive critiques. In the past the students had only given positive kudos. They were analyzing with a critical and respectful mind.

## XI. BREAKING DOWN STEREOTYPES AND BUILDING METACOGNITION

I worked specifically on breaking down stereotypes using class discussion, journaling, and self-inquisition over a two-day span. The first day I focused discussion around how labels and categories are used to describe others. The students generated lists of five major categories including "redneck," "outgoing," "funny," "popular," and "sporty." Individually the students wrote any comments or thoughts they had associated with the five categories. While discussing the lists the students found they did not agree with each other on the comments due to their perceptions of each type. We discussed the following questions: *Do assumptions apply to everyone in a group? How do assumptions affect your behavior? Support or disagree with "Most people hold the same assumptions."*

The following homework was assigned: *Journal about your thoughts on what a stereotype is and what happens when stereotyping occurs. Can it ever be a good thing?* The following day a deep and thoughtful discussion ensued. Their understandings of stereotyping were insightful, and they all agreed that passing judgments on others could be a negative thing. When asked why they make judgments about others, the students replied with various answers like:

- *associations come from other experiences they have had*
- *it's a natural human action*
- *it's dangerous to make those assumptions*
- *it's a bad habit*
- *a lot of harmful stereotyping occurs out of fear*

I then asked the students how they thought they could break down stereotypes. They responded with,

- *look for the good in others and don't make any judgments*
- *if someone looks different or dresses differently, get to know them*
- *expand your horizon, open your mind, think about learning from others; everyone has something to offer.*

As Emily stated, "We're scared of what we don't know. Instead of hiding in our boxes we should go explore."

Emily's response proved the discussion and exercises were sinking in. The students were gaining an understanding of stereotyping and the depth of it. They were openly sharing ideas and discussing respectfully.

During day two we moved into the discussion of race versus ethnicity. I performed a similar activity by choosing five racial/ethnic groups to write on poster board. The students chose Muslim, Catholic, Christian, African, and Caucasian. The students took turns writing comments or assumptions they had about each category. We then discussed the value or devastation of categorizing by ethnicity or race.

The most pleasant and unintentional surprise occurred during class discussion. Emily explained, "I have become more aware of myself stereotyping. I am catching myself when I do it and really thinking about it. At least now I realize it." I was overjoyed to hear Emily's "aha" moment that all teachers yearn for. At least the students were beginning to think about their thinking! This was a break-through, and I was thrilled! Meta-cognition had occurred; the students were showing their skills of "thinking about their thinking."



## XII. BROWN EYES/BLUE EYES PROJECTS

I was having a difficult time creating an experiential lesson that would submerge my students into a racial/stereotyping scenario. Numerous class activities had allowed my students to see the differences among their classmates; and they now knew the dangers of stereotyping. But did they have a firm understanding of the dangers of it?

Our school nurse shared a program called "A Class Divided" by a third grade classroom teacher, Jane Elliot. In Iowa, on the day after Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated, Jane Elliot divided her classroom according to eye color and ran the students through a series of exercises over a two-day period to actually experience the hurt and action of discrimination.

After viewing the video [A Daring Lesson](#) on PBS's Frontline, I was intrigued to try this project in my own classroom. The video clip stated that the students that were discriminated against actually performed at a lower level in class lessons, which I wasn't sure I truly believed. I had my doubts as to whether the experiment would have a significant academic or social impact upon my students. In fact I was not sure the experiment would even faze my students.

I briefly outlined the lesson to my students and asked them if they would be interested in participating. They all agreed that it sounded like fun. We discussed as a class a good way to divide the students; they asked that I separate the students with blue eyes from the brown eyes. I further posed a dilemma that I only saw them for a fifty-two minute class period; and I wasn't sure it was a long enough period to gain the full effect. They recommended I carry it through the following period because I still had a large part of the class for that class period. I asked them if it was okay to carry it through the lunch period, though I would not be there to participate. In order to make sure it was an equal exercise I told the students the roles would be reversed the following day. They all agreed upon the scheduling and understood the project would commence the next day.

I cut black circles to identify the brown-eyed students; they would be discriminated against first. I handed out the black circles "marking" the brown-eyed students as the unfavorable ones and gave the class the rules (Appendix H). I placed one black circle on a bathroom stall, which indicated that was the only restroom the students with brown eyes could use. Those students wearing the circles had to sit in one group in the class, could only use the drinking fountain at the end of the hall, and had to have permission to be out of their seat. Students wearing the circles could only converse with "their kind" at lunch and recess. When I taught class, I angled my body so I primarily addressed the unmarked students. I would only call on a student with a black circle if no other student raised his or her hand. If the "marked" student raised his/her hand, I would make derogatory comments to the effect of "how can you not understand this?"

Within the first couple minutes of the activity the students were giggling and joking around, but after about ten minutes the discrimination message began to surface and emotions were being felt. The unmarked students began to make rude comments and band together against the "marked" students. They were giving demeaning looks and ignoring each other. The blue-eyed students spoke with a proud tone in their voice and with negativity towards the students with brown eyes.

At first disbelief and a struggle to fight back arose in the students with brown eyes, but within minutes all students but one stopped trying to participate. I had one student who tried to survive; but eventually he too gave up. Visually the students looked beaten down and seemed hurt by peer/teacher comments and mistreatment.

Between classes one of my colleagues entered the room; she said she could tell a difference immediately in the tone of the room and with the students. She could feel the tension in the class.

I was most surprised by the reaction of one of my students who is typically outspoken and challenges the limits. Experiencing the effects of being marked,

he became angry and silent. He was upset about the way others were treating him with no justification.

Once the exercise was completed, I asked them to journal about their day and the project. The following day I had to coach the students back together as one. I was worried there was too much damage done during the exercise; there was a definite line between the students. I facilitated a discussion over the project about their personal feelings and the significance of the project. I had to start with a rule about not using names of other students because of the hurt feelings that occurred.

Throughout the discussion of their personal feelings the students shared their frustrations of feeling like "less of a person" than the rest of the class. They were angry at the situation and felt helpless and frustrated with the lack of justification for the way they were being treated. They also shared their experiences of feeling incompetent.

The amount of time it took for the students to fall into the trap of stereotyping and mistreating others was minimal, five to eight minutes, which was alarming to me. Junior high students are very impressionable and easily influenced by their peers. The other major surprise I had was the learning effect on the marked students. Jane Elliot reported it took her marked students five and one half minutes to go through the flashcards. The following day the same students went through the flashcards, and it took them three and one half minutes. A student explained to Mrs. Elliot that the "collars" (which marked the students) didn't let them think.

To my surprise the experiment proved the most beneficial of all the lessons. The students shared the following feedback from their experience:

- Things were being said without actually being said.
- The majority group took control, and it felt like being a black person in a white school.
- I mistreated my friends knowing it was the wrong thing to do just because everyone else was doing it.
- It created a great opportunity for revenge.

- At first it was funny that we could do the same thing as the marked group, but we didn't get in trouble for it.

When I inquired specifically about the effect the activity had on their education, the students responded with: "I couldn't live up to my potential." "It made me feel dumb." "I felt worse about myself." "If others didn't care, then why should I care."

I underestimated the value of this project; it presented the students with the needed perspective in a brief amount of time allowing the students to gain a taste of discrimination and why it is important to accept differences. I was excited to have found an impactful lesson that gave students the opportunity to understand with the mind and heart the danger of stereotyping and intolerance. In comparing Jane Elliot's third graders from 1968 and my eighth grade students in 2010, five years of maturity and over forty years of societal "evolution" actually yielded very few differences in the final results of the exercise.

The Elliot documentary concluded with interviews of her students as adults. In each case, the individuals vividly recounted their experiences as children. I would bet that similar results could be found in ten years with my students. Racial role-playing through this lesson leaves a lasting, incredibly valuable impression on students. I had finally found the lesson that impacted the hearts and souls of my students. They not only understood the power of intolerance, they had actually experienced it!

### XIII. "UNBRAND" ME T-SHIRT PROJECT

I utilized Amy Hutchinson's hypertext lesson *'Unbranding' to Encourage Diversity*. Hutchinson says, "I created this lesson so students could explore the ways branding undermines efforts to build community and encourage diversity, while simultaneously reinforcing damaging stereotypes." I not only used this lesson for Hutchinson's objectives but also wanted my students to take their cultural research and apply it in an artistic format.

I purchased a white t-shirt for every student and fabric markers. I asked the students to journal about how they would define themselves. Junior high students have a tendency to be mini-clones—they want to be like their peers. Negative judgments occur when the students see differences. I wanted to attack this issue head on. I wanted the students to discover their differences, present them artistically, and declare their differences by publicly wearing them. I asked them to consider their heritage, interests, dreams, goals, and anything that pertained to them. Using their journal entries I assigned the students to design a unique brand that belongs only to them. They were not allowed to use an advertising slogan or emblem to represent themselves. I encouraged them to put a lot of thought into how they created their brand. The students were to write an artist's statement about the meaning behind the brand and what inspired their design. The students were given a rubric to guide them through the project (Appendix G).

The students were very excited about the prospect of this project. I kept reminding the students to spend diligent time reflecting upon themselves and what makes them unique. I urged them to create something they would be proud of — something that would compel them to want to wear their shirts again. Riley struggled through her creation and at one point had tears; she was frustrated by the complexity of creating something meaningful that represented her. I had given my students one week to work on the project. After that week, Emily was still struggling to create a meaningful brand. At the eleventh hour, inspiration came to her and she was able to create something she was proud of.

To my surprise every student worked with a compelling drive, which resulted in beautiful and meaningful t-shirts. Some students were so proud of their projects that they asked if they could take their print down to Gusts, the local department store, where t-shirt printing is done. I gave the students the option to use the fabric markers or do a professional screen on their t-shirts.

I set a class period aside for the students to present their branded t-shirts. They could either read their artist statement or explain their brand. This gave the students another chance to effectively use their presentation and discussion skills while continuing their work on respectfully disagreeing and asking quality inquisitive questions. This clearly illustrated their meta-cognitive growth.

### ARTIST STATEMENTS AND BRANDS

Savannah explained her brand,

I drew this because I thought of a lot of stuff and the stuff I've been through in life and how it is like a tornado. You know when it starts but not when it ends. You go through life with twists and turns. You know when your life starts but not when it ends, but no matter what go down with a smile. The wires are for the fences you have to jump to get where you want. I love my picture I drew. I worked hard on it. The name is for my name and I chose black, pink, green and the other colors because they are all my favorite colors.



Todd explained his brand,

My logo is the symbol of my life, my ways, and views. My logo consists of four things (simplicity is a virtue): a target, cracks, a hole in the middle, and Earth within that hole. The target represents the fact that I aim for certain things in my life. The cracks represent the troubles I have in life. The hole represents where the goals I have lie. Last, but not least, the Earth is the middle of the hole represents happiness in this world for which I strive. The logo is me and who I am.



Gracie supports her work with,

I chose this as my logo because I think it shows a lot about who I am. My last name is on the spur...I tried to symbolize that I am proud of who I am. And by putting it on the spur I wanted to say that my family is very strong and stays together. Since spurs are very strong and do not break easily even in decades of time. I chose to put my family's brand because it says what I want to do when I get older, (take over the family ranch). I

wanted a buck on there because I like hunting. Also deer normally travel in packs. I tend to surround myself with people and animals. The rope is there for a few different reasons. It is shaped in a smile and the metal circles on the spurs are eyes. I try to stay positive and keep a smile on. I also like to rope. There is a music note because I love music. It can help me with pretty much anything. The target is there because I aim for my goals and try not to let anything stop me.

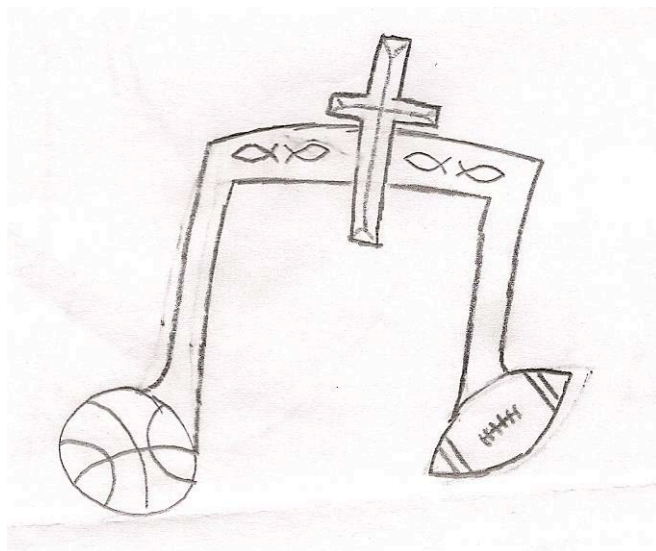


Rob shared his brand,

I made my logo because I think it describes me. I made it look like a music note because I like music, singing and playing the guitar. I also put a basketball and football on there because they are my favorite sports. I also have a cross and the Jesus symbol because I am religious. I wanted

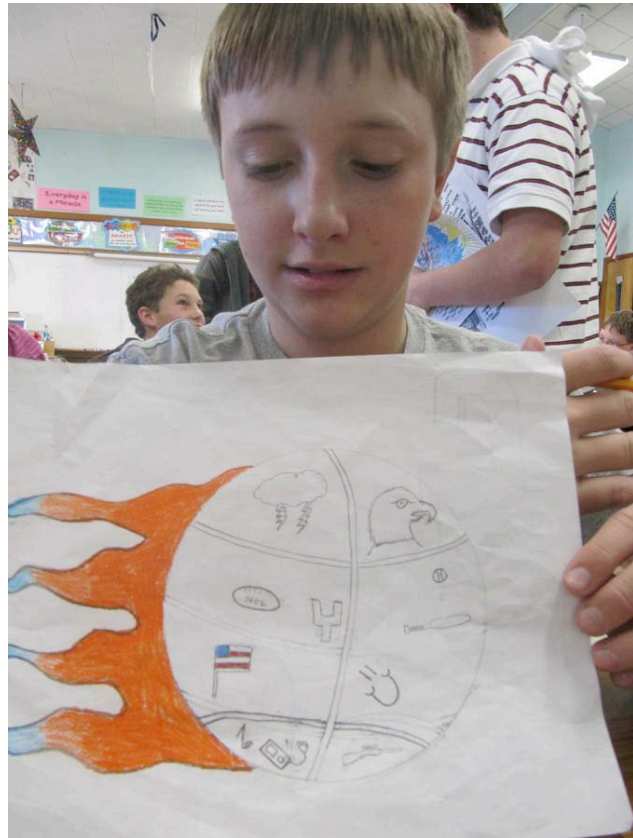


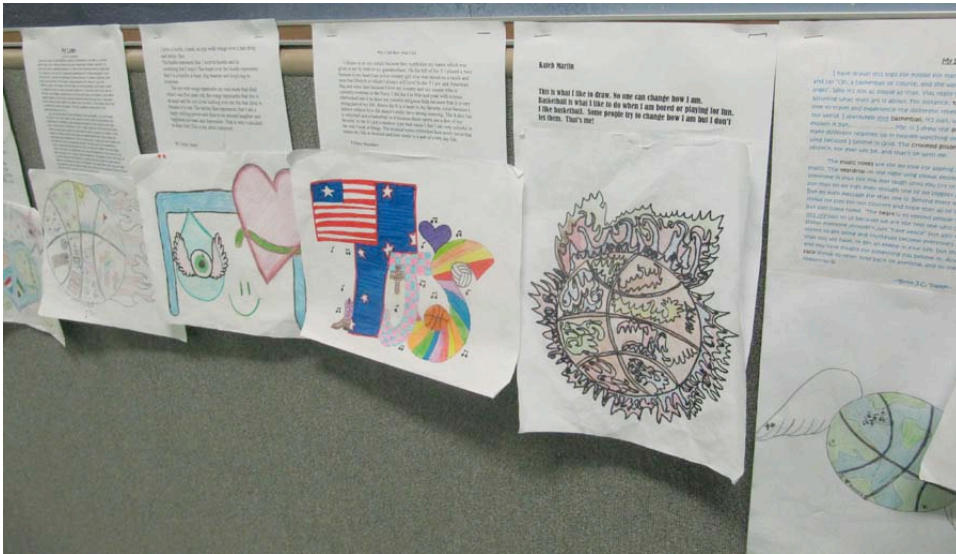
to somehow put something that symbolizes my mom but I didn't know how. I decided to use my original design and I think it worked pretty well.



PHOTOGRAPHS OF T-SHIRT PROJECT







Artist statements and original sketches of brands hung in hall to share with the school.



#### XIV. GUEST SPEAKER TELL DIETZLER

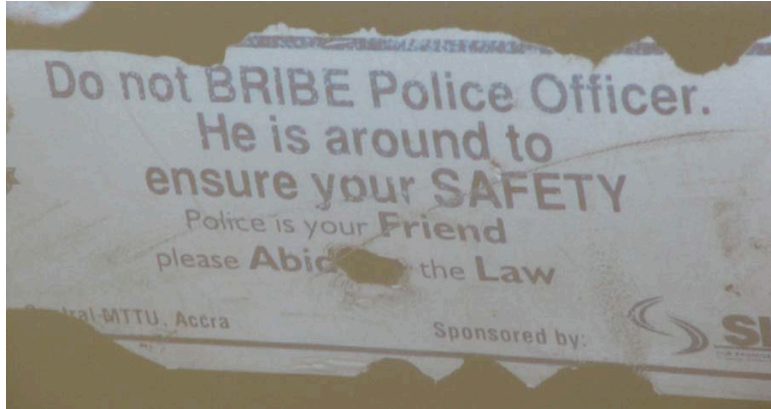
One of my former students, Tell Dietzler, traveled to Ghana for a five-month exchange program during the summer of 2008. His experiences and the people he encountered enlightened him. I invited Tell to share his experiences about living in another country and the new perceptions he gained from these experiences. Tell discussed the cultural differences including the relaxed atmosphere, food, entertainment, education, clothing styles, transportation, religious beliefs, music, wildlife, language barriers, and the endearing friendships he found along his journey. His enthusiasm for life, kindness, and genuineness was transparent as he shared his stories. The students were enthralled with Tell, the lessons he shared, and the drumming on his djembe. It was truly a treat to have Tell's presence within the classroom.

At the conclusion of his presentation, my students personally went up to thank him without my prompting. They showed him their appreciation for his time and knowledge, which excited me to see the students begin thinking for themselves and freely expressing themselves to a stranger. The students were becoming mature members of society.

A few weeks after Tell's presentation one of my students, Emily said, "I have a relative that wants us to come to Africa, but I was too scared until Tell came to visit." Even after Tell shared his stories of danger in Egypt, malaria, poverty, and lack of food options, Emily found the courage to overcome her fears and find her desire to travel to a country that would put her completely out of her comfort zone. Emily was excited at the prospect of learning and experiencing something new despite her own fears.

## PHOTOS OF GUEST SPEAKER TELL DIETZLER

With many giggles and much surprise students gained perspective about an African law enforcement system.



Tell shares his African drumming expertise with the students.

## XV. CREATION OF DIGITAL MOVIES FROM EPAL PHOTOS

My students had collected photographs from their epals for the duration of the school year. Prior to embarking upon the creation of the third digital movie, we discussed the struggles the students had with the previous digital movie and how we could curb any problematic situations.

The students shared their concern of inadequate computer time and lack of computer accessibility. In an effort to ease the inadequate computer access I created a computer schedule for the students to rotate through during reading class and study hall times. They did not utilize this option; hence, the problem remained. They were also disappointed with the number of photos they had received from their epals. They were concerned about making a quality movie with few photos. To remedy these problems, we brainstormed ideas. I offered a possible solution to group the students and let them create one digital movie per group.

The students worked in small groups collecting the sparse epal photos to begin their creation of the 'cultures of the world' digital movies. My students were so focused on acquiring photos from their epals for the assigned project that only a few of them had meaningful conversations. I was disappointed that the focus was on the project instead of the journey. This specific project was not as successful as I had hoped. When planning this project again, I would only find one dedicated school and work on fostering a deeper relationship with the school to share their culture. We will continue to converse with our epals through the remainder of the school year in an attempt to build a meaningful relationship by inquiring more about their lives.

The students gave me constructive criticism regarding the digital movie-making project for next year. The way they spoke freely, but respectfully, made me very proud of them and their growth. They had legitimate concerns and had possible solutions. The students were analyzing the issues and brainstorming possible solutions; they were using critical thinking and problem solving.

## XVI. QUILT PROJECT

I wanted a simple culminating project that would require the students to condense their understanding of the material, and summarize it into the three most vital concepts learned. Once each student completed their cultural influence (square) they would be "quilted" together representing the class culture.

I asked the students to represent their ideas on an 8x8 inch square piece of paper. I assigned my students to reflect upon the projects and class discussion in their journals. They were to choose the three activities, projects, or discussions that made the most impact on them. The students were to represent their three choices artistically on their paper. I asked them to think broadly and use creative ways to present their ideas. Some students used a list format while others used photography, drawings, or a 3-dimensional collage format.

When the quilt squares were completed I arranged them to make one united culture quilt to adorn the ceiling of the room (Appendix I). When my non-homeroom students came into class, they were inquisitive about the quilt and why so many squares had drawings of ipods on them. I explained we had done a project with music; the students thought the music project taught them a lot, so they represented that with an ipod on their quilt square. Their curiosity makes me eager to share this project with future students.

For me the project was especially valuable because I gained insight into the lessons that were more valuable than others and the depth of student understanding.

My students shared the following insight:

Phil: "I drew the t-shirt because I learned a lot about myself and others. I never really thought how proud I am of my heritage until now."

Rob: "The project that Tell came in and spoke about Ghana was the most inspiring project to me. I realized that our culture is a lot nicer than most people."

Tia: "I learned everyone is different, but they all have reasons for who they are! I have learned many different things. For example when we did the Ipod I learned that music can reflect your personality or it can help you get through certain times in your life....Finally the t-shirt [project] made me realize that people aren't always as they seem and have more than one part to them. I learned a lot about myself and what's important to me."

Scott: "Find the good in things. I think you should always see the glass half full not half empty."

Chris: "Just because you like something doesn't mean other people have to like it too."

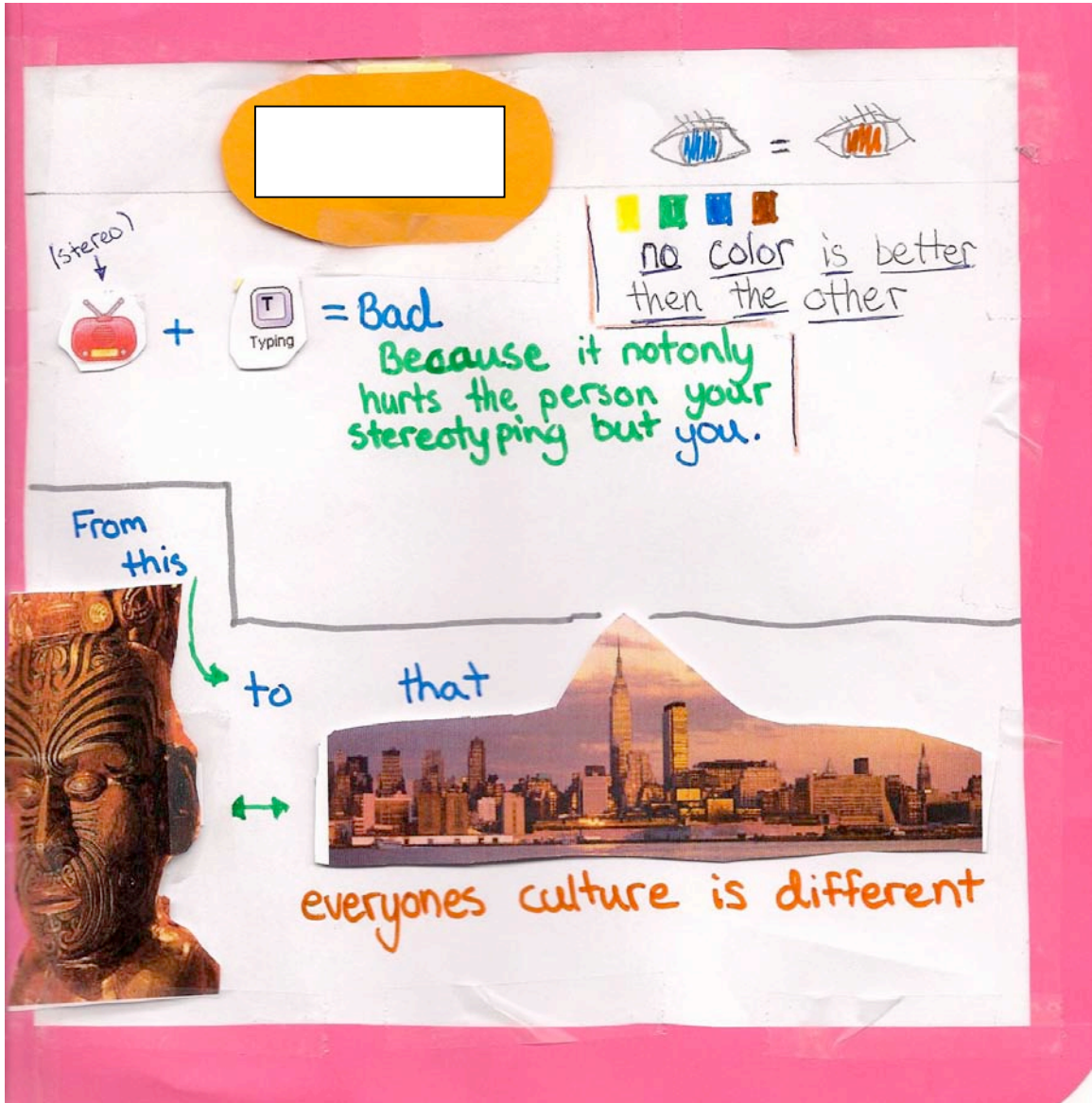
Sarah: "The pantene [commercial] taught me that you can do whatever you want no matter what. The photograph of me taking a photograph was from Mery's fabulous presentation. I have taken my camera everywhere!"

Gracie: referring to the eye project, "...that even though you have differences it doesn't mean you should treat them differently. You could have tons of things in common. Judging is hurtful. Also it's not fair to the people being judged.

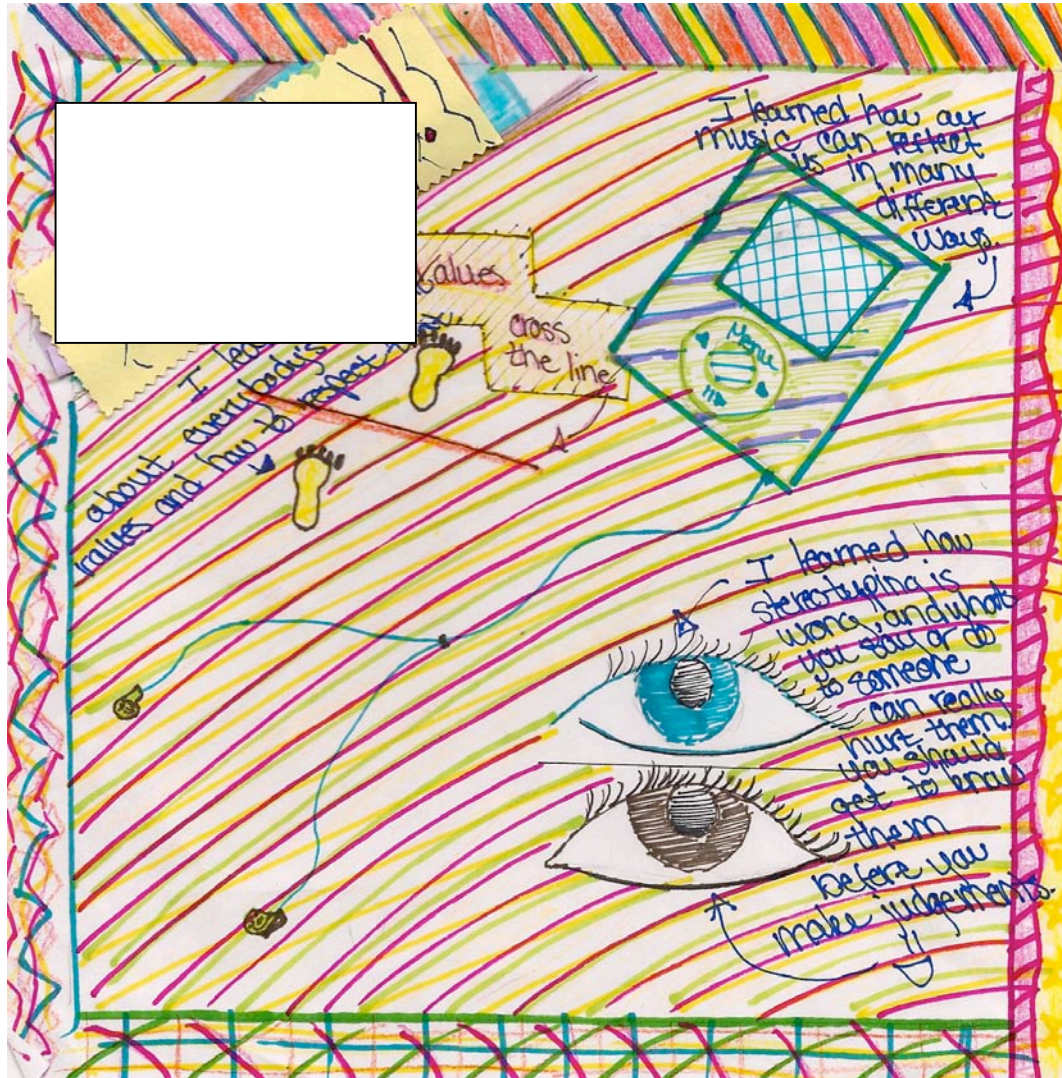
Emily: "When I created my logo, I learned a lot about myself. It was a great project. It really made me think about who I am and what my values are." Emily learned about cultural acceptance from Tell's presentation. During class discussion she learned the value of discussion with respect, 'well, in my opinion...' and 'I get what you're saying, but think of it this way...' are courteous ways to give personal perspective without criticizing another."



Matthew: "no color is better than the other [eyes project]....stereotyping = bad because it not only hurts the person your stereotyping but you. Everyone's culture is different."



Riley: "I learned about everybody's different values and how to respect that."  
[line crossing project]



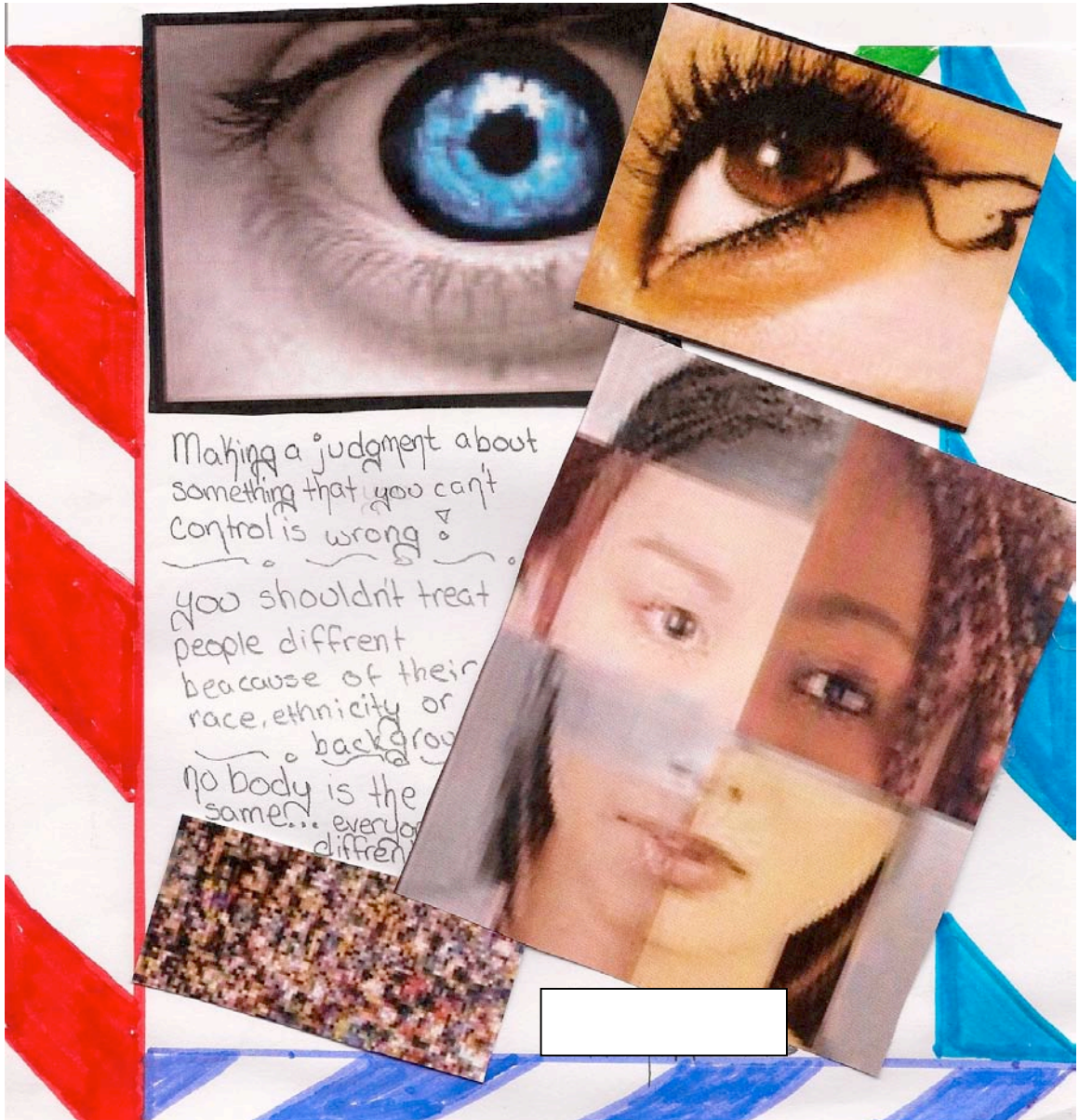
Kelly: "After every class discussion, you leave the class knowing something more about culture, diversity, ethnicity, or pure judgment."



Savannah: Referring to the eye, t-shirt, and ipod project, "Everyone's different in our own ways. Just because you're different doesn't make you weird, it makes you special. We don't have to be the same. It's better when we are different."



Kianna: "You shouldn't treat people different because of their race, ethnicity or background."



## XVII. CULTURAL CONNECTION TO THE YOUTH AT OUR SCHOOL

I wanted my students to make waves in the world with their knowledge and experiences learned throughout our cultural awareness unit. I felt the best assessment of my students' understanding was to send them out to teach and make connections with other students. I inquired whether they would be interested in doing a peer tutoring/teaching lesson with the younger students at our school; they responded with enthusiasm and excitement.

I discussed some helpful teaching insight about attaining student attention, maintaining classroom control, and keeping the students engaged before letting the students begin the planning process. Divided into groups, the students were to discuss the one objective they wanted to teach and complete the lesson plan (Appendix J).

Upon completion of the lesson plan they had to conference with me about the lesson and then audition their lesson in front of the class. We analyzed whether the lesson really met the objective and shared ideas of how to improve the message. We compared lessons to determine what made one lesson more engaging than another. The students understood the value of presenting a quality lesson within the classroom.

I made personal contact with prospective teachers about the project and the lessons my students wanted to share. The teachers were very supportive and encouraging. It was a welcome response from teachers and students. The lessons were positive and carried meaningful messages, teaching our youth the value in tolerance and acceptance. My students were making the intended waves in the world - teaching others how take a step towards a peaceful school and society.

One team of students focused on individuality with one of the first grade classrooms. They shared a video of Dr. Seuss's Sneetches, which teaches the dangers of being a follower and the value of being an individual. After the viewing of the video my students tossed a ball to first grade students to answer specific questions regarding differences.

Another team of eighth grade students also worked on recognizing and embracing differences. My students split another class of first graders into groups for station work. While one station graphed eye color, another station graphed favorite pet. The graphing stations allowed the students to discover just how different they are. At the last station the first graders made imprints of their hands in salt dough to show the kids that although their hands may appear the same in many ways, there are also differences when you look closely.

Another team of eighth graders worked with the sixth grade class discussing the dangers of stereotyping. My students split the sixth grade students into groups. Each sixth grade student had a label they wore around their head, like a crown. The students could not see their own label, but were able to see the labels of their peers. Labels included "Agree with Everything I Say," "Ignore Me," and others. The goal was for the sixth graders to plan a camping trip within their group while complying with their peers' "labels." The powerful exercise demonstrated the dangers of stereotyping.

The lessons not only allowed my students to teach their information with strong convictions but also to show students the power they have with self-expression. I was ecstatic to see the growth in my students over the year, and the comfort level they demonstrated in teaching the lessons. I attribute their comfort to the confidence gained from the subject matter and being more comfortable with themselves as people. They were becoming leaders that were thinking for themselves and sharing their knowledge with others.

## ANALYSIS

*This section analyzes my personal growth throughout the course of the graduate school experience and how I plan to use this to create more aware students who will be sensitive, contributing members of society.*



## XVIII. CHALLENGES

My original intent was to begin with a few activities to recognize cultural, similarities and differences before focusing on the photo exchange with the foreign epals. I wanted my students to feel the depth of the lessons; but the activities were only scratching the surface. I had not anticipated the need to expose my students to the large number of lessons required to help them gain a depth of understanding tolerance. I struggled to find a lesson that would reach the depths of their hearts and allow them to empathize with those less fortunate. Not until I discovered and submersed my students in the Brown Eyes/Blue Eyes project did I create that level of understanding for my students.

I had developed what seemed like a simple plan with a specific end goal. However, I had to rely on other people, their timelines, and making the most of bad situations. There were numerous stumbling blocks along the way. Due to my teaching schedule I had to manipulate my curriculum for health and reading class. Unfortunately, my health class does not meet two times a week consistently due to in-service and sporting event schedules, school counselor visits, vacations, etc. I had to cram in as many lessons as possible in a short period of time.

Another very large challenge was technology. Our technology budget is small, and accessing updated movie-making programs was not an option. My students trudged through the movie making process with older versions of imovie. I divided reading class and study hall time among twenty-seven students and three computers. I had visited with my principal about a guaranteed grant I was supposed to receive and asked him if I could start investing in portable laptops for my classroom; he reported the money had fallen through.

I had students creating digital movies on their home computers, school computers, and personal laptops. I even shared my new, personal laptop in an attempt to ease student stress. There were numerous versions of imovie and moviemaker being used, which caused great confusion when it came to questions like, "how do I burn this to a disc?" Although the answer seemed

simple, there was always a glitch and not a universal answer. I had one student who could only use the free trial of moviemaker. I ended up at his house one evening helping him to make sense of the program. I had another student who was almost finished with his project when the program wouldn't let him continue his work. After I investigated the situation and the technology teacher worked on it, he had to start over. There were also server issues when trying to save the projects. My students like to wait until the last minute to complete their work, which meant their procrastination cost me in lunch periods and after school time. My prep periods were spent trouble-shooting with students or answering questions. I had minimal school time for math class preparation because any "free" time was spent working on technology issues.

Aside from the technology issues, I was relying on people I didn't know to help me fulfill this commitment to my students and self. Many of the teachers who committed to the cultural project through epals did not follow through. Those teachers that did follow through were inconsistent. My students received photos that came from the internet, instead of personally photographed pictures. This frustrated my students. I kept encouraging them and explaining that this part of the project was out of our hands, but that we should continue to correspond and ask for photos in a polite manner.

This was the largest homeroom class I had taught since I started eleven years ago. I knew finding enough cameras for this project could be a challenge. I surveyed the class regarding camera availability, either with a digital camera or cell phone. With me contributing three of my personal cameras and the technology teacher sharing her personal camera, we were covered.

During the photo-shoot of our culture around town some of the students failed to follow directions; batteries were dead and memory cards were full. When it came time to download the pictures, many of the students did not have the correct cords or memory card readers. I invested in extra memory card readers and thumb drives immediately.

The person I originally contacted to visit the classroom is a world-renowned photographer whom I was fortunate to take a class from this past year.

I had hoped that she would be willing to share her knowledge and expertise with my class. Disappointed when she didn't return my call, I tried Mery Donald, a local photographer who has published work in magazines but also does weddings and family photos. I had no doubts I'd made the right decision in calling Mrs. Donald when I saw her strong connection with the students and her organized and applicable handouts.

With challenges I try to stay calm and brainstorm options. When students came to me in a state of panic due to some technology issue out of their control, I coached them on these same tactics of believing it will be okay, staying calm, and searching for possible answers. I really wanted to take every opportunity this project presented to teach my students how to perceive things in a positive way.

## XIX. PROFESSIONAL DISCOVERY AND PROFESSIONAL ASPIRATIONS

I began my Creative Pulse trek in the summer of 2008 with a mind that I thought was open and willing to learn. After one week of classes I had more questions than answers--with the biggest question being, "Why did I apply for the Creative Pulse?" As a math teacher I was not sure how I fit into this program with art and music teachers. I don't know how many times I reread the Creative Pulse course descriptions, trying to assure myself I would find the value of this program. During class discussion I felt I had little to contribute, but knew I loved absorbing what everyone else offered. I compared the worldly knowledge others had to share with my shallow depth of knowledge and experience. I fought through the feelings of "not belonging" with others whom had so much to contribute. Instead I looked at the experience as an opportunity to gain new perspective from others. I tried to make sense of the lecture and reading material. During the seminars and apprenticeships I absorbed the material, but it seemed disconnected. After two years of the Creative Pulse and beginning my final creative project, everything was beginning to come together. It now became a challenge to know which concepts to focus on.

After working on my master's program for two years and having thirty 8th grade students in my homeroom, I was not looking forward to the upcoming school year. I began reflecting upon my perception and had a realization that it wasn't the individual students I was dreading; it was the number of them. How unfair of myself to dread the experience of all these talented, energetic souls because of my own assumptions. Once I changed my perception before the school year commenced, I was enthused to be with my students and begin a new year with an exciting project planned. Again, Dr. Kriley's lecture about changing perception had revisited me.

In order to avoid scaring the students with the idea of having to keep a "journal," I introduced the idea of recording their thoughts in "reflection books," a concept that was readily accepted. The power of journal writing has never been so evident to me. My students were able to freely express their more private

beliefs without having to share openly. The value of recording their thoughts on paper was also readily evident. It gave the students an opportunity to voice their opinions and discover themselves. Hetland et. al. talks about the questioning and explaining format as being an integral part of "fostering an inner voice of reflection" (65). Answering open-ended questions assists in this process known as meta-cognition.

I did not give Kimberly Sheridan and her colleagues enough credit for their work with the *Eight Studio Habits of the Mind*. I used journaling as a tool to inspire my students to write and explore their thoughts and for a resource tool for me. I never imagined the journaling, self-critiquing, and presenting of projects would be so powerful. In Studio Thinking Hetland et al. reports, "The habit of reflection helps students become independent workers and become 'able to self-monitor'" (66).

When interviewing Beth Balliro and her class at the Boston Arts Academy, Sheridan and her colleagues inquired about Balliro's questioning techniques. Balliro responded with,

I want them to be able to articulate their process and articulate how they're different from other students. They can figure out how to be more of a presence and how to advocate for their own growth in a way that allows people to hear them (Hetland, et al 66).

The reflection books were also very powerful for enabling the students to spend time thinking and articulating their thoughts. I felt one of the reasons the t-shirt project produced quality work was because the time I had the students commit to writing and brainstorming before they moved on to sketching their work. When the students were struggling with their brand, I would send them back to their reflection books to write more. Throughout the journal writing process of using open-ended questions, the students had to articulate their thoughts and feelings. I was thrilled when they wanted to share their new knowledge with the younger students. They felt they had something valuable to teach and kids would listen. They were able to synthesize and clearly present the objectives to others, a testament of truly understanding the information.

Through the process of reading my students' reflection books and class discussion I realized they might be teaching me more than I was teaching them. I found myself wanting to dig deeper into their minds to better understand how they felt and what they thought. Inadvertently, I found my daily inspirational quotes gave me that opportunity to know some of my students better and bond with them. When the school year commenced I decided to write inspirational quotes on the whiteboard in my classroom to provide subtle messages. The quotes ranged from making good choices about the future of one's life to becoming a positive influence as an integrated member of society. As I wrote the quotes on the board I found many that resonated with my own personal feelings. The students were interested in reading the daily quotes and were soon bringing me their favorite quotes. Quotes were another way for the students to express themselves with limited risk. I was inspired by the insightful quotes they shared. This provided another way for me to know their minds and hearts. Knowing their hearts provided a personal connection between us that allowed for an improved relationship educationally and personally.

As a teacher I am constantly reflecting upon how I can improve a math lesson or make it more exciting for the students so it will be remembered. In the past I have intuitively done things that I felt would be an asset in the classroom. Not until my Creative Pulse journey have I found the deeper meaning as to why I do what I do. I have always trusted my own intuition, but Dr. Kriley's lecture on meta-cognition has taught me to examine why I take the actions I do. Although I continue to struggle with my own meta-cognition, I feel I have made strides in this. I no longer just leave it to the excuse of "intuition." Because I am searching for the root of my intuition, the lesson/objective is taught with a deeper meaning instead of scratching the surface of the topic. The Brown Eyes/Blue Eyes project is an example of this. My own meta-cognition has made my reading and health lessons more powerful and given my students a deeper understanding.

Upon completion of the Brown Eye/ Blue Eye project, a simple but profound understanding had resurfaced. After teaching for ten plus years I had direct evidence of the power of positive thinking. I watched my students struggle

academically in a repressive environment. At the same time, my son's first grade teacher gave me tips to help my son read. She suggested some books to attempt, but most importantly she emphasized the importance of giving him kudos and belief that he was being successful. As humans we have a need to feel good about ourselves. I witnessed it with my own child learning to read. I witnessed the opposite with my students struggling to excel in the classroom.

I always want to help others; but during this project and working with technology, I found I didn't have the answers. I generated experiences for discovery rather than lecture; this in turn created empowerment and confidence for the students. I was able to take a situation and turn it into a positive experience through exploration. The feeling of teaching students the power of taking charge and solving one's own problems encouraged me to treat other student issues the same way, not just technology issues. One student came to me after she had completed her t-shirt logo. She was upset because another student had copied her logo. We discussed her options to solve the problem: create a new logo, approach the other student about the matter, add to the existing logo, or leave the logo. I encouraged her to do nothing but think about how best to solve the problem. She returned the next day to school with a smile on her face and reported she was satisfied with her logo and was not going to push the issue with the other student. I was relieved to hear it was ending in a mature, peaceful solution.

Being a math teacher for the past eleven years, my lessons involve teaching regimented material--the answers are either wrong or right. There is problem solving that involves a formulated plan. When it comes to teaching health class or reading class, I typically struggle with guiding class discussion. In the past I have a prescribed list of questions or data that I have prepared to cover. I do not allow for much class discussion because of my focused and intense teaching style of "needing to get through the material." As I engaged my students in a conversation about their peer teaching lessons with the younger students, they were very quickly conversing back and forth with each other instead of me. I stepped back and was so excited about exchanges I observed. I

would throw out a question regarding something one of them had said and let the students converse back and forth. I felt as though my teaching skills had evolved from a question and answer format to a question and discussion format that guided itself throughout class time. I attribute this to my willingness to use more class discussion. I was able to set up and facilitate a promising conversation amongst classmates because my thinking process was not so limited.

Empathy is a key component to understanding others' cultures without judgment. Daniel Pink states,

But empathy is much more than a vocational skill necessary for surviving twenty-first-century labor markets. It's an ethic for living. It's a means of understanding other human beings—as Darwin and Ekman found, a universal language that connects us beyond country or culture.....Empathy is an essential part of living a life of meaning (165).

I could explain to the students the value of diversity and the importance of empathy towards others, but nothing would compare to the power of putting the students through a simulated experience. They would not only understand but also be able to feel it. I continued to search for projects that would have an impact on their hearts and souls, not just their minds. I thought the epals project would assist in this lesson. However, as I moved through the project my goal of interacting with epals was not providing the depth of perspective I had hoped.

My project, like a multi-faceted gem, added a new dimension - teaching empathy. The occurrences over the course of the school year in the lives of my students provided the depth of experience within the confines of our classroom. Life and death occurred for my students, teaching empathy along the way. During the month of December I had one student attempt suicide. The following week a student's mother died unexpectedly leaving her and her four siblings. Another student's mother is losing a battle with Lou Gherig's disease. I took a look around the room and realized I had one student whose father was murdered when she was very young. Another boy had lost his mother in a drug and alcohol related car accident. Another girl's mother was killed when she was five. I had a new student move in just this year to live with her father whom she met for the



first time in August; she was taken away from her mom because of drugs. I was dealing with students who were survivors and other students struggling to survive. Due to their proximity to this strife and tragedy, my students were learning empathy and tolerance simply by helping each other with real life changes.

I realized the impact a school could have exposing students to lessons like empathy. Teaching my students empathy was invaluable. Many of my students think no one understands their life and no one could have it worse than they do. So much of their world revolves around the social pillar that when tragedy strikes they only think of themselves and have no empathy. Teaching differences and diversity allowed them to see the bigger world out there. Compared to other cultures my students saw how fortunate they were to have what they have. Exposing them to other cultures the students gained an appreciation for what they have and more importantly what others do not have.

I discovered through the creation of digital movies that the majority of students waited until the last minute to complete their project, which resulted in angry feelings, impatience, mediocrity, and lower grades. After listening to students bargain about the points they were willing to lose due to late and incomplete projects, I knew I needed to adjust my lesson, expectations, or some aspect of the lesson to get quality work on time. I decided that in the future I would have more check-in dates and scheduled meetings with the students to discuss progress and concerns.

There was so much of the epal project that was not in my control. I knew I wanted my students to learn social and cultural tolerance, so I took other avenues when the epal project was not taking flight. My original thought was to connect my students with numerous cultures. I assumed that the more cultures they were exposed to, the greater the awareness they would gain. When pursuing this part of the project in the future, I would not attempt to connect my students to a variety of schools but instead focus on one school that has vast diversity. I would desire for my students to learn deeply about their epal's culture and who they are, instead of the shallow knowledge gained from a few epals. It

is not the width of knowledge, rather the depth and impact of experience that's valuable. Looking inward to discover and understand what it is that we are about was a vital part of this lesson. The self-discovery encourages one to look beyond to see all the potential of human existence--all the great qualities one can aspire toward.

By putting my students through experiential learning, I have gained a deeper understanding of the value of meta-cognition and how to offer that to my students. My intentions of having students explore their culture and other cultures metamorphosed into a beautiful and deeper project of self-discovery, self-expression, empathy of another's situation, and acceptance of different perspectives. I am thrilled about their meta-cognitive growth, pursuits in photography, and their own sense of being comfortable humans. I feel the unit has given my students more confidence from the experiences of not just speaking in front of their peers but speaking about their opinions as well.

My students exemplified growth and a strong ability to articulate their differences to their peers. I was impressed with my students' clarity and genuine declaration of their spirituality/faith. Throughout the projects the students were constantly analyzing their culture and using meta-cognition to discover their active and passive voices. They became more conscientious members of society.

At the culmination of this unit I sat at my desk one afternoon working on a project while the school counselor was discussing some paperwork my students needed to complete for their entrance to high school. I was smiling to myself as one girl voiced out in an act of independence and solidarity "Why do I have to share my ethnicity with the school?" She further explained she did not understand why her color would be important. Yes, my students were more aware. Yes, they had become a larger part of society and could demonstrate leadership qualities in an attempt to make a difference in the world. We shall continue to learn to make waves from our own core of existence to create one world with one people.

Professionally, I plan to continue with a condensed version of the cultural awareness unit to teach tolerance, and more importantly meta-cognition and self-awareness. I am looking at the possibility of teaching a workshop on movie making to interested students as an extra-curricular activity. I will also be working on ways to acquire more computers for my classroom. I will be a strong advocate for purchasing a mobile laptop lab. Teaching tolerance and diversity was once the goal, but now it is the vehicle I will use to teach self-awareness, self-expression, meta-cognition, and empathy. It was the journey, not the destination that made this project so powerful.

## XX. PERSONAL DISCOVERY AND PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS

This project challenged me personally. Being a driven and goal-oriented person I attempt to control much of my surroundings. Waiting for contact with willing classrooms through epals and gathering photos was not within my control. This presented me with the opportunity to practice patience and look for alternative routes to accomplish the objective.

My reflective writing is where I first realized I was using meta-cognition. Journaling gave me the freedom to explore my thoughts and ramble. Often I would write aimlessly and later read what I wrote. I realized there was more value to what I wrote than what I had originally thought. I also used journaling as a way to keep my thoughts organized and goals clear. With so many avenues to travel with my project I was able to brainstorm and outline the most critical objectives I wanted to cover with my students. I recorded class discussion with my journal, which I used as a resource for this project. My journal is the story of my life--the highlights and the struggles.

Working on my final project has not allowed me to pursue my interest in photography. Until Mery Donald's visit to my classroom I did not realize how much I missed shooting photos. I have stayed in contact with Donald and asked her to revisit my classroom to share her experiences in the Philippines. I plan to continue my own practices with photography and inquire with Donald about the possibilities of working with her. My goal is to discover my own style and be able to take artistic photographs of my children.

My newly found interest in other cultures made me reflect upon how I plan to expose my own children to the diversities of the world. The cost of competition is putting many Americans into debt and forcing a lack of focus on family. As Americans we stop at nothing to be the best. We have become a society that is competing against one another with limited regards to affordability. At the expense of family and health, we strive to be better than one another. We have become a society that is about greed, materialism, and body image. While I struggle with all those things myself, I feel I can help my own children to

experience those things first hand by exposing them to different cultures. There is so much to learn from others if only one is willing to listen and learn. In Mery Donald's blog she describes her observance of a cultural difference after her mission to the Philippines.

I have never seen so many beautiful smiles and peaceful souls. Nearly everyone I photographed seemed completely comfortable in their own skin, which is a rare thing in the United States. The people of the barrio have a serene presence that really comes through in the photographs. It almost reaches out of the images.

I plan to expose my children to more of the differences this world has to offer through travel, music, the arts, and awareness through communication. I took my children to meet Molishmael Gabah. Gabah, from Ghana, Africa, visited a local church trying to raise money to take back to his village for an after school program he started. He shared stories of his life, the present educational system, dancing, drumming, and dreams he has for his people. When asked why we [Americans] should assist his people in Ghana, Gabah responded, "It is not my people and your people. We are all one. If we all thought this way, we would have a chance at a peaceful world. It is not about "yours" verses "mine." How wonderful it would be to truly believe the world is one. We wouldn't need to break down stereotypes. We could appreciate and learn from each other. These are social truths that we must keep working towards.

I desire for my children to be worldly participants in society. My own growth with meta-cognition and seeing what it has done for my students has affirmed my desires for my children to be meta-cognitive and critical thinkers. When my children tell me something that seems profound to them I find myself following up their statement/story with "why?" I want them to think about why they think or feel a certain way.

Through the Creative Pulse journey and my work on my final project I have altered my perceptions and feel I have become more connected with myself as a person and teacher. I have learned to monitor myself about my own judgments and am learning that the power of not judging others allows me to live

a more peaceful and fulfilling life in my community. I have opened my eyes and mind to valuing others opinions without making judgments.

The Creative Pulse pushed me to explore myself, and my deepest insecurities. I had to expose those fears to myself, and search for the root of my "issues." By dealing with my own issues and exploring new interests I have gained confidence and the willingness to step outside my comfort zone. Each time I push my limits, I grow. I am either empowered to try new things or learn something from a mistake. Prior to my Creative Pulse experience I never spoke at school staff meetings in fear of sounding naive. Within the last two years I have spoken numerous times with confidence and felt that people listened with respect.

I want to be involved in groups/activities that will broaden my horizon. I joined a book club this past year to meet new people and read books that I normally wouldn't try. I am open to trying different foods, which is really stepping outside my box; artichoke on pizza is delicious! I search for music that is different than what I usually listen to. The most beautiful part of seeing the world through a new lens is that it only makes me more curious to explore further.

With the opening of the Creative Pulse chapter in my life, I have discovered new doors of promising prospect and opportunity. From the work I've done with my students, I want to continue to share my compassion for mankind with my own children by sponsoring a child who is less fortunate. I have pondered for many years about adoption, and even more so this past year, but I am conflicted about removing a child from his/her own culture. Then again, by posing this question, have I learned anything - aren't we all one? I plan to take my family on a mission when my children are old enough to understand and gain the value of such a trip.

I am concluding this graduate project thirsting for knowledge and new experiences, rather than feeling settled on what I have learned. I yearn to take more classes, read books, and meet new people who will broaden my perspective and feed my soul. With these new goals I smile upon the

experiences, memories, and accomplishments the Creative Pulse has afforded me. The doors of opportunity are wide open.

APPENDIX A

CROSSING THE VALUES LINES CHECKLIST

Read over the following values and circle your top 5. Rank these 5 in order of importance with your #1 being the **MOST** important.

\_\_\_\_\_ **Friendship**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Popularity**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Family**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Fun**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Honesty**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Financial Security**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Religion**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Integrity**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Trust**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Humor**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Respect**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Pride**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Listening**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Education**

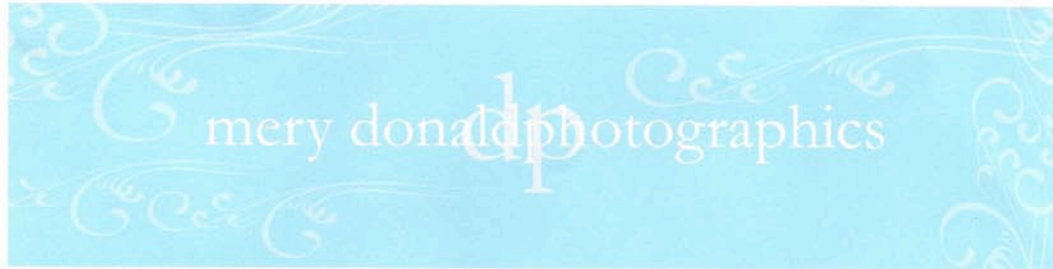
\_\_\_\_\_ **Possessions**

\_\_\_\_\_ **Community**



APPENDIX B

Mery Donald Photographics handouts



What do you notice about images that grab you?

What draws you to the person/ object you are photographing?

What is it about the subject that is interesting to you?

What do you want to convey to the person viewing your image?

How do you accomplish that?

What tools can you use, as a photographer, to do that?



[Experiment ] shoot from different perspectives up high, down low etc.

get in close, step back for a wide angle shot

move around to shoot from different sides, angles

try different settings (camera modes)

[Check the background] be sure to check how your subject looks in relation to the background. Look for distracting objects

[Get close] use your zoom (optical not digital) or your legs!

fill the frame

beware of cropping – result will become more pixilated

[Take lots of Photos] don't be afraid to take several shots of each subject

practice makes perfect!

[Capture the overall story] shoot people, details, landscape to tell more of the story

[Find a focal point] identify the point of interest before you press the shutter  
then think about how you can highlight it.

[Composition] rule of thirds  
create flow around or through the image

[Review ] review your images with someone else and get their perspective on your shots

[Camera modes] auto  
portrait  
landscape  
night  
action  
macro  
aperture priority  
shutter priority

[Focus lock] press shutter down halfway to focus on subject then move camera while still holding down shutter to recompose

[Hold steady] slow shutter speed in low light  
take a breath and lean against a stationary object to help keep camera steady  
tripod

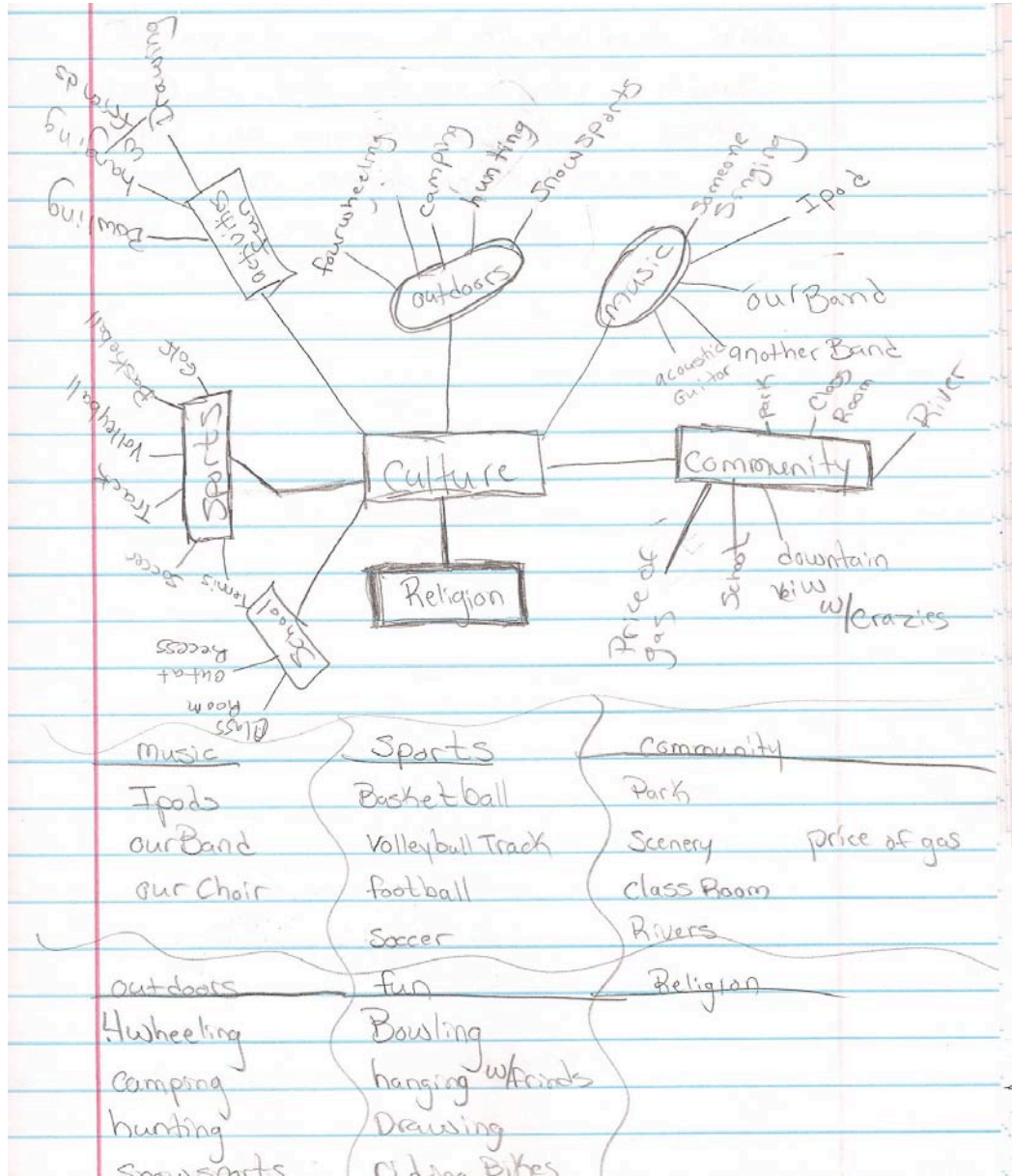
APPENDIX C

Valentine Bulletin Board with student photography.



## APPENDIX D

Lindy's analysis of community and personal culture:



APPENDIX E

## ***Personal Culture Movie Rubric***

<u>Criteria</u>	<u>Pts. Poss.</u>	<u>Pts. Earned</u>
Title page (title of movie, producer, date)	10	
<b><i><u>Categories of photos in movie:</u></i></b>		
town/panoramic views/landmarks (5 pix)	10	
weather (3 different photos)	6	
my interests (minimum of 5)	10	
businesses of Big Timber (minimum of 5)	10	
traditions (minimum of 3)	6	
meals (minimum of 5)	10	
clothing styles (minimum of 2)	4	
Photo of self (minimum of 2)	4	
Clear/Readable Labels on each category	10	
<b><i><u>Aesthetic Value</u></i></b>		
Chosen music (does it reflect you)	10	
Music lasting duration of movie	10	
transitions (from one photo to another)	5	
conclusion of movie - fade out on music	10	
appropriate explanation/narration of photos	10	
appropriate length of time for each photo	10	
<b><i><u>Technical Production</u></i></b>		
quicktime format	20	
loaded onto server ready for presentation	10	
ready by due date <b>Jan.8</b>	100	
<b><i>TOTAL</i></b>		<b>265</b>

## APPENDIX F

### Sample Critiques of Personal Student Culture Movie

What worked?

The music fit.

What needs work?

Some of the words and pictures moved a little fast.

Other comments?

You had pictures other people didn't and that was really cool and made it different.

---

What worked?

I loved the pictures & angles of pictures. Ex: the flowers & basketball hoop.

What needs work?

To label pictures more & do some transitions.

Other comments?

I loved your music! It really reflected you.!!

---

What worked? Your movie flowed really well. The perspectives of your pictures were original. Your pictures and music really reflected you.

What needs work? A little better labeling.

Other comments?

---

APPENDIX G

"Unbrand Me" t-shirt rubric

UNBRAND ME tshirt

5

CRITERIA

paper sketch of your own logo

Artist's Statement: clear and thorough explanation of how you came up with design

Artist's Statement: typed

completed design on tshirt

tshirt design doesn't have/use other advertising logos

tshirt design reflects you as a person

Explanation of what you learned from this project

**TOTAL:**



## APPENDIX H

### Brown Eyes/Blue Eyes Rules:

#### Monday: BLUE EYES are SUPERIOR

- People with brown eyes must wear a black circle to denote they are one of the "less desirables."
- People with brown eyes will sit in the front of the classroom where it's not "cool" to be.
- People with brown eyes can only use the restroom stall with the "black circle" on it. If it is full you must wait until it is empty. You may not use another one.
- People with brown eyes may not talk to, play with, or go to lunch with anyone that has blue eyes.
- People with brown eyes will be at the end of the "8th grade" lunch line.
- People with brown eyes will be at the end of the line when dismissing for class. You are in charge of making sure the floor is cleaned up and all chairs are pushed in.
- People with brown eyes may only drink out of the cup. You get one cup for the week. You may not use the drinking fountain. You wouldn't want to give your germs to anyone else.

#### Tuesday: BROWN EYES are SUPERIOR

- People with blue eyes must wear a black circle to denote they are one of the "less desirables."
- People with blue eyes will sit in the front of the classroom where it's not "cool" to be.
- People with blue eyes can only use the restroom stall with the "black circle" on it. If it is full you must wait until it is empty. You may not use another one.
- People with blue eyes may not talk to, play with, or go to lunch with anyone that has blue eyes.
- People with blue eyes will be at the end of the "8th grade" lunch line.
- People with blue eyes will be at the end of the line when dismissing for class. You are in charge of making sure the floor is cleaned up and all chairs are pushed in.
- People with blue eyes may only drink out of the cup. You get one cup for the week. You may not use the drinking fountain. You wouldn't want to give your germs to anyone else.

APPENDIX I

Culture Quilt



# **MENTORING TOLERANCE LESSON PLAN:**

**Group Members:**

**Lesson Objective (when we are finished teaching what do we want students to know?):**

**Lesson Designed for this grade level:**

**Materials needed & who will be in charge of getting them:**

**How will we get and maintain student attention:**

**1. Introduction of Group:**

**2. LESSON**

**A) Grab student attention - getting students interested in what they will be learning. This is a lead-in activity. You don't want to tell students what they will be learning in this section; think more about how you can exemplify what they will be learning in a creative way. Is there a book, story, mini-play, video clip, trick, or experiment that could do this? (1-5 minutes):**

**B) What activity will we use to teach the objective? (10-15 minutes):**

**C) How will we check that the students understood the lesson without telling them what they should have learned? (5 - 8 minutes)**

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