

Ryan Pleune
Free Writes – Action Research
Winter 2010

Please do 7 minute free writes on each of the following questions (remember, no judging of what you are writing and keep that pen going!)

- *What are three things that you are curious about related to professional practice?*
 - Affects of wild/natural spaces on engagement in life and learning => Leading to activism and advocacy of eco-justice – See article “Best of Both Worlds”
 - Wilderness Awareness School Village - <http://wildernessawareness.ning.com/>
 - How to promote and develop teacher health and well being - <http://www.couragerenewal.org/>
 - Giving/providing time and professional pay – Plumbers, auto mechanics and electricians make more money and are allowed more time to do a professional job than teachers – Not to mention the cliché doctors and lawyers – “Sexism” in history of teaching – it is a female job.
 - Honoring professionalism – would you ask a surgeon to justify why they stepped out of SOP to address issues of obesity or extenuating circumstances? When I teach ESL students or “at-risk” youth who are many grade levels below peers in reading, why would I be forced to follow same protocols as NCLB mandates – ie high stakes testing etc??? Enforce results and high expectations on me but measure over 6 year time frame with different indicators than standards assessed via paper and pencil tests. Are my students actively engaged in society?
 - Reducing teacher ::student ratios and creating pre-service teaching situations that show us how to take advantage of smaller class sizes...ie lecturing time is reduced and replaced with “instructional conversations” in small groups
 - Increasing collaboration and social/professional interactions
 - Mind Body Spirit Health
 - *How to align social justice, critical pedagogy, and activism – What things can I learn from organizational learning/leadership orgs that will help me bring together multiple stakeholders in educational communities?*
 - Theory U - <http://www.presencing.com/>
 - Society for Organizational Learning (SoL) - <http://www.solonline.org/> - Membership??? <http://www.solonline.org/aboutsol/connections/>
 - Headwaters Leadership - <http://headwatersleadership.com/> - Specifically Leading Change - <http://headwatersleadership.com/case-study-leadingchange.html> and People Centered Change Implementation http://new.changefirst.com/background_to_pci
 - Cognitive Policy Institute - <http://www.cognitivepolicyworks.com/>
 - Adobe Youth Voices - <http://youthvoices.adobe.com/> <http://youthvoices.adobe.com/peapod/>
 - Majora Carter Group - <http://www.majoracartergroup.com/>
 - *What are three concerns you have about being a caring and committed teacher or other professional?*

- Many people don't have access to wild and natural spaces. I feel guilt about my life's privilege and sometimes it clouds my vision and inhibits action. In my heart I believe that all people have a longing to be connected to nature. This was reaffirmed by E.O. Wilson and Biophilia along with writing and work done by contributors to the Biophilia Hypothesis. I have also seen the positive benefits of learning to live outdoors through my work as a wilderness therapy instructor and as a teacher on yearly back-packing trips with urban youth. However the time and energy required to engage in these endeavors is overshadowed and written off as luxuries and accessible only to people of privilege. Especially in the current economic climate, jobs and working in the city is top priority for urban education and the emotional benefits of spending time outdoors is extraneous.
 - For me to be a caring and committed teacher my concern is about the emotional, physical and spiritual health of the teachers and students that I work with. The health in these areas is decreasing or non-existent in most academically rigorous settings. Time spent to attend to physical, emotional and spiritual health is considered as lost time instead of an integral and necessary enhancement to academic rigor. Because of the way that subjects are departmentalized in schools there seems to be little to no connection between performance and health even though most psychologists have demonstrated this direct link.
 - Another concern I have about being a caring and committed teacher is that the student load (amount of students per teacher 200+ at high school level; 28+ in K-6) and class sizes (30+ HS; 28+ES) do not facilitate an atmosphere where all of these ETL pedagogies are possible. Teacher:Student ratios are directly related to successfully implementing constructivist and student centered learning but to address this or change this we have to increase funding for FTE's (Full Time Employees – Budgeting language for school districts).
- *What three problems or dissatisfactions do you have or foresee, with your teaching or professional work?*
- Teacher Load and Class Size
 - Low levels of collaboration in schools – Everyone is too busy
 - Assessment systems and tools seem inadequate and dishonest – Grading, Testing, Numbering
 - Access to extended periods outdoors is limited or not possible.
 - Disparate reading levels 9th graders reading at 4th-10th grade reading levels
 - Most teachers were successful in school or liked school – promotes status quo.
 - Most teachers seem to be concrete, detail oriented => hard to show/share big picture visioning
 - Being outdoors is uncomfortable to most teachers => teaching outdoors is unlikely
 - Integral aspects of environmental literacy is unfamiliar to most teachers/people => Instead of viewing environmental literacy as a pedagogy

- to teach all current subjects holistically most people think of it as more standards to “teach” rather than new way of teaching current standards; MSDE is working on a long list of environmental literacy standards instead of putting time into teacher training and mentoring. Writing standards is cheap and functions within current system – developing environmental literacy would involve re-designing system. “We can’t arrive at the solutions to the current problems using the same thinking that got us into the problems” (???)
- Student in large high school feel anonymous => Acting out behavior; Teachers also feel anonymous=>No one takes ownership to change current situation despite dissatisfaction.
 - Discussion of power and privilege only talked about (if at all) in social studies
 - Truancis and Failures are 80% - 90% from one zip code = societal issue is at the foundation of failure but teachers are being blamed. Schools are not equipped to confront and treat this problem.
- The question said 3 problems and I listed 13 and could have continued for over an hour. The book I am reading Theory U describes a summary of these problems on a societal level not related to school but just human organizational learning:
- I think all of these problems can be addressed by looking at the interior conditions of the leaders (all levels students, parents, teachers, administrators, superintendents, secretary of education) in the education system. I am currently operating from this perspective:
 - “...the late CEO of Hanover Insurance, Bill Obrien. He told me that his greatest insight after years of conducting organizational learning projects and facilitating corporate change is that the success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervener.
 - That observation struck a chord. Bill helped me understand that what counts is not only what leaders do and how they do it but their interior condition” the inner place from which they operate or the source from which all of their actions originate.” (Scharmer 2007 p. 7)*

Now, look at what you have--look at the nine things you have listed. What larger issues come to mind? Can you find an issue related to each curiosity, concern, and problem? Take one issue that holds promise as a research topic, and do another free-write about it. Focus on your thoughts, experiences, and questions related to this possible topic.

The larger issue that comes to mind for me is that the interior experience for people is not talked about, guided, facilitated, nurtured or honored in any school settings outside of some exceptional k-5 classrooms and the radical 6-12 classrooms. Through out my own education I progressively moved away from any subjective experience as part of being a responsible adult. Those things were to be kept inside, and far away from science or professional work. I think that what has helped me reconnect and stir the significance of this “interior work” is while sharing experiences in the wilderness personally and professionally. The issue I trace through out all of my writing is related to how people connect to wild and natural spaces, what meaning they make of it and what effects that has on their engagement in life. I am currently defining spirituality as

the sense that people have about how to live life. My spiritual practice involves ritual connection to wild places and it brings about what I think is an innate set of morals for my interaction with all parts of my ecosystem. I have heard other people describe this as transformative learning or transformative education. Throughout my free writes I can see where I want to explore how to incorporate this type of education in the formal school environment and how that process will instigate or necessitate school reform and result in an ethic of ecological restoration on both a subjective and objective level.

Take the issue you wrote about in your last free-write, and turn it into a statement of the problem you tentatively will investigate. Then pose a question, or two or three, that go to the heart of what you think is the problem.

Problem: - Society and Education have become atomized or departmentalized which eliminates critical understanding and development of our human interior condition.

Questions

- How can schools maintain specialization and academically rigorous content knowledge while integrating subjective or interior human development which requires interdisciplinary or “trans-disciplinary study” – Ex: Our article title “The Best of Both Worlds” unifying critical pedagogy and place based education. How can I co-create a school or entire education community based on that type of pedagogy?
- What are the effects of connecting to wild and natural spaces on organizational leadership? On students? On teachers? On activists or community organizers?
- What does connecting to wild and natural spaces look like?