

Meghan Brennan

CURR 308 | Lowenstein

December 18, 2013

### Teaching for EcoJustice and Community Exhibition Reflection

I really enjoyed the EcoJustice exhibition and found it to be a good extension of this course, the unit project, and the discussions on place-based education. I greatly enjoyed listening to the speakers, being involved in the coordination of the event, being a participant, hearing about the fascinating projects that my peers have been working on, and being surrounded by like-minded people. I feel that this exhibition process is a powerful learning tool and I'm grateful that I was able to participate in one before the end of my college career.

My favorite part of the exhibition process was that it didn't represent the final work for anyone. The speakers discussed on-going projects and topics that were currently relevant to their day-to-day lives. It was nice to hear from two inspiring individuals who are constantly engaging in and working towards incorporating ecojustice and place-based education into their classrooms and communities rather than hearing from someone who has everything done and in place. These two speakers showed us that teaching for ecojustice and community is an on-going process that we will always need to work towards and maintain if we are to adapt it as part of our educational philosophy.

I was also impressed with how the work from the graduate class was not perfectly completed because it seemed to give the round-table discussions more depth and purpose as the grad students discussed where their papers still needed work. I felt that we were able to help them think about different possibilities that they hadn't considered before. I know that personally, it was incredibly beneficial to hear the thoughts and opinions from other about my project. Sometimes it's easy to become consumed in something that you are not able to step back and take a different perspective towards it. This exhibition really helped me to do this.

My least favorite part of the exhibition was not getting the chance to go around and see the other curriculum units that my peers have been working on. I was able to briefly see Emily and Kailey's project because their display was at the table next to mine, but that was it. I was impressed with the amount of children's literature that they had displayed. Several of the people that stopped at my table commented on the amount and quality of children's literature that I had out. Apparently nobody knew how many children's books existed about worms!

I had a great conversation with a high school teacher about why I had chosen to include so many books in my display. I explained that it is important in the early elementary grades to constantly be connecting content to appropriate literature because there is so much to cover in terms of comprehension and reading fluency in order for students to be successful in the later years. I felt that the creation of this unit was an excellent opportunity to explore and work with children's literature that carried meaningful themes and ideas. Thank you for requiring us to include at least one children's literature lesson within the unit because otherwise I may have never learned about all of the worm books that were out there.

Over the course of the exhibition, I discovered that the downside of working alone is that you don't have anyone to switch out with so that you can walk around and visit all the tables; however, the plus side of working alone is that you get the chance to talk to all of the different people that stop by your table. I was able to chat for a minute or two with a teacher that had previously done a worm unit in a second/third grade class. She gave me some great ideas about how the worm unit could lead into a school-wide initiative to save compostable items from lunch and snack time to be added to the school compost pile. For some reason, I hadn't thought of this as a natural extension to the composting aspect of this unit. Sometimes it really does take discussion and collaboration to further explore how great an idea can be.

My only suggestion to improving the process of the exhibition would be to maybe make the curriculum presentations similar to the round table discussions. It felt a little too much like a science fair with everyone mostly walking around and just gazing at the displays on the table. I was eager to discuss how awesome an ecojustice approach to education was and how my unit worked to incorporate some of the main ideas of ecojustice, but it seemed that most people wanted to spend less than thirty seconds at each table which is not long enough to have a very deep conversation. If I had known this was how it was going to be, I think that I would have spent my preparation time creating a more appealing display rather than arming myself with essential questions and discussion topics. Thinking about it now though, I'm not sure if structuring the curriculum presentation portion like the round tables would be the best idea because then people would not be able to visit every presentation, so I'm not sure what is the best solution.

I think my longest conversation was with Erin, one of the guest speakers. I was very eager to chat with her about her work with children and place-based education outside of the classroom. She really inspired me with how well she thought on the spot when talking to us during the Q&A. I liked how she said that place-based and ecojustice education does not come easily because you are trying to re-shape a culture, which can be incredibly overwhelming, so you have to start with yourself first. This reminded me a lot about what I had been reading in *Active Hope*. Erin was a very eloquent speaker and I loved chatting with her.

Overall, I'm very grateful for having the opportunity to participate in the exhibition. It really reinforced the idea that there is a whole community out there that is passionate about changing the face of education for the better. Before this semester, I was worried that education was seriously stuck and that no one wanted to put in the work to switch things up, but now I know that change is possible, it just takes a community.