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Teaching Demonstration  
Missouri State University  
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### **8.3% and Rising: An Inquiry into Poverty and Hunger**

Community literacy is a rhetorical practice for inquiry and social change. Seen in its educational context, it, like other forms of critical literacy, is the heir to John Dewey's vision of progressive education, in which people learn things by a hands-on experiential and strenuously intellectual engagement with the world. We learn, Dewey argued, through active experimentation and reflection.—Linda Flower, *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*.

#### **Introduction (10 minutes)**

**Goals:** The goal of this teaching demonstration is to introduce inquiry into social justice issues as a means of community literacy. It addresses how students in an English or composition classroom might connect to their community through committed interaction or a problem-based inquiry.

**Rationale:** Many schools advocate for a school-community connection, but very few actually make long-lasting or deeply integrated connections. I have often sought ways in which students could learn more intimately about their local place whether it be the history, culture, or geography of the community in which they live. This project asked students to investigate the level of poverty and hunger in our rural community in light of initial knowledge that our local county food pantry was experiencing a food donation shortage, especially in the summer months when students who may receive free or reduced lunches are no longer in school yet still have a need through the summer months. Students constructed questions for the people and agency representatives interviewed as well as fact sheets and promotional flyers and an iMovie synchronizing their team's data.

#### **Questions:**

1. What do you know about the needs of your local place whether it is rural, suburban, or urban?
2. What might your subject of inquiry be about your locale? Are there problem-based inquiries? Are there historical, cultural, economic, geographical, or ecological questions that need to be addressed in your community?
3. What kinds of questions do you think your students could ask residents and agencies in your community?
4. In what ways might your students write about their local community's needs? What genres would be utilized?
5. In what ways could you publicize your findings?

#### **Set up for Today's Activity (10 minutes):**

Please free write for approximately ten minutes about a need in your community. What connections do you have to local agencies in your community? Do you volunteer on a regular basis? How much do you know about the marginalized in your community? How much do you think your students know?

**Today's Activity (40 minutes):**

1. Presentation of examples of student videos created by Aurora High School seniors in English 4 in 2012-2013. After we view a few examples, please answer the following questions:
  - a. What do you notice about the way the stories were told?
  - b. What do you notice about the writing?
  - c. What do you notice about the audio and visual mediums?
2. Think about a need or issue in your community. We want to take some time now to do our own writing about our experiences in our community. You can choose to write about an agency you work with in your community or an observed need as a teacher, parent, student, writer, etc. Or think about people you know in your community who are marginalized or struggling economically, for instance. Consider why they may be struggling and contemplate how we might give them a public voice while maintaining their integrity through private discretion. Or write about a time you experienced a need and the frustration you felt because there were no agencies to assist you. We'll write for about twenty minutes.

**Closing (30 minutes):**

We will work in small groups to generate some possible school-community connections that could generate critical literacy experiences for your students. This is a brain-storming activity to help each of us think of ways in which we can more fully investigate the needs of the people in our communities. How can we use the expertise of our local community members to help our students expand their knowledge? Please take a moment to envision what prior knowledge could be used to create a problem-based inquiry. Please have one person record your brainstorming session on the Padlet Wall on Padlet.com. We will spend fifteen minutes brainstorming and share out each group's brainstorming session in the last fifteen minutes. We will finish with exit slips on TodaysMeet.com

**Resources:**

Christensen, Linda. *Reading, Writing and Rising Up: Teaching about Social Justice and the Power of the Written Word*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 2000. Print.

---. *Teaching for Joy and Justice: Re-Imagining the Language Arts Classroom*. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 2009. Print.

Flower, Linda. *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*. Carbondale:

- Southern Illinois UP, 2008. Print.
- Hass, Toni and Paul Nachtigal. *Place Value: An Educator's Guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeways, Environments, and Purposes of Education*. Charleston: Clearing House on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1998. Print.
- Leslie, Claire Walker, John Talmadge, and Tom Wessels. *Into the Field: A Guide to Locally Focused Teaching*. Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 1999. Print.
- Linn, Allison. "Sprawling and Struggling: Poverty Hits America's Suburbs." *NBCNews*. 22 March 2013. Web. 4 April 2013.
- Sobel, David. *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classrooms & Communities*. Barrington, MA: Orion Society, 2004. Print.
- Welch, Nancy. *Living Room: Teaching Public Writing in a Privatized World*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2008. Print.

**Hamilton County Poverty and Hunger Inquiry Artifacts:**

- Project Description
- Common Core Standards
- Final Evaluation Rubric
- Student Self Evaluation/Reflective Letter
- Student Generated Interview Questions
- Guidelines for videos
- Final Video Evaluations (conducted by administrators and faculty)
- Final Letter to Participants and Agencies
- Consent to Publish Form
- Thank you notes to participants
- *Aurora News Register* article
- Example of flyers A and B
- Examples of Fact Sheet
- List of donated items
- Links to Poverty and Hunger videos