

Draft #3

the skeleton

Visit to Brenda's classroom.
Student teaching experience
compromise ~~my~~ values ~~there~~

4-6000 words

Listening to Children's Voices and My Own Inner Voice

Inexperienced, nervous, unprepared, excited, I faced my class of 13 students who were squashed together in a corner of the library. This was definitely not the ideal learning environment. How was I to create a sense of community, a safe place where children could learn and take risks? By the end of the first week of school I realized that the students I was working with had a strong dislike for school. They would say things like may day may day, I can't read/write, and I hate reading/writing. I needed to find a way to change their attitudes and subsequently improve their skills since 11 out of the 21 students were non-readers and all but two of the others were reading below level as shown on the Durrell, a test of reading fluency and comprehension. The students had know idea how to read. Some were relying on the sole strategy of sounding out words while others did not even have this skill.

Consciously I set a goal to improve the students attitude toward learning but I did not ask an action research question. However, in hindsight my action research question would be: How can I create an environment that will foster a positive attitude toward learning in my students?

In order to understand why I had set this goal I must answer this question: Why is the sense of community and a safe environment important to me? Where do these values originate? As a child I remember being very curious and always feeling comfortable exploring my environment when a family member was nearby. I was the youngest of eight children so there was always someone around. I also remember when I was in grade 2, the teacher would read to us and then ask questions. I had difficulty making sense of something which I have not read myself. I did not feel comfortable during these times and would often fake illness during these times. I did not feel safe enough to risk providing an answer that may not be correct. It is based on these and other experiences that I have developed a strong belief that children must feel safe in their environment and with those around them before any real learning takes place.

Soon my class grew to 21 students and I was given more time to work with them. It was at this time that I began collaborating with Brenda on a Books and Buddies program which was designed to develop reading and social skills through peer tutoring. I thought that this program accompanied with a great deal of encouragement and praise, fun activities in the classroom, and little homework would help to improve the students view of school. (Why I assigned little homework is linked to one of the reasons the children had learned to disliked school.)

A few months into the school year I was discouraged. I was still hearing from the children that they hated virtually everything at school including physical education and art. I walk slowly down the hall with the weight of the world on my shoulders. Should I be a teacher? Can I give these children what they need and deserve? As I walk into Brenda's room, she is sitting at her desk. She stops, looks up and asks how things are going? This was all I needed to open up and share my frustration and insecurities with her. She listens without judgement and responds by telling her own story. This dialogue

My story about students

Begin with my values



Brenda leaving fear of not having support found Joan

good

~~My story about students~~ ~~use evidence~~

- reflection
- deconstructi

while ^{she} Brittany was reading. The solution which came out of our sharing was that Brittany would put her arm around her buddy to help her buddy become more focussed. The type of sharing that was occurring between the students would not of happened if they did not feel comfortable with one another. This is an example that a safe environment had developed in the classroom. Furthermore, this is an example that these students were themselves conducting action research into their practices with their reading buddy.

I really saw the improvement in my students' attitudes in March when a new student arrived in my classroom. She was having difficulty reading. When she came to read to me she said "I can't read, it's too hard." It was at this time that I sat back and realized that I hadn't heard those words in such a long time. The students had come so far. They were saying things like "don't tell me that word I can figure it out myself." One girl's public speech was titled 'I Love Books.' The students had really begun to understand what reading was about ^{and} had developed confidence as readers. They had begun using various reading strategies which included looking at the picture for clues, cutting words in half, looking for little words in big words, and sounding out. They also had developed an appreciation for how important reading is. The following are examples of what the children wrote when asked 'What is reading?'

Reading helps you to write. It is fun. You learn from reading. You get better. Some books stink. Some books are cool. It is sad. It is special. It is exciting. To know about it is incredible. It helps people learn. You get smarter.

Sabrina Grade 3

Reading helps you to write. Reading is in your life. You have to learn to read because if you don't you will not be able to do your groceries. Reading is important for you. Reading is how you get to go everywhere.

Melyssa Grade 2

These two examples illustrate that the children not only understand the importance of reading but had developed a love for reading. ^(expand) Another example that the students' were developing confidence was the test results on the Durrell in June. All of the kids were readers. All but three of the students improved by a grade level and many improved by much more.

I knew I had reached my goal in May when the one student who had believed strongly all year that he hated all aspects of school, came up to me and said "I'm a good writer." I knew then that his attitude was changing and he was opening himself up to learning.

^{Opening} I presented at the ITCR in April, not really knowing until after listening to the keynote speaker, Jean Clandinin, that what I had done was similar to action research. It was at this time that I realized that I ^{belonged} ~~should be~~ at this conference. Prior to the conference I was feeling a little unsure of whether or not I, a first year teacher, had anything of value to contribute. I realized that attending the conference had a great deal of value for me and as things progressed and I talked with other teachers I felt more comfortable, I felt safe.

^{story} ^{KEM} ^{EXP}
↳ Need more info. - more flow!
more background.

continues and I gradually feel the tension leaving my body. I felt reassured, capable of moving forward.

good The above is the perfect example of my interpretation of what a sense of ~~community~~ or safety ^{env.} means: An environment where I feel safe to express myself openly and honestly...where I can allow myself to be vulnerable with limited fear...peel away the layers of myself...exposure, acceptance, validation...a place where I can grow as a person and as a professional.

good In our discussion Brenda told me that she thought that there was a discrepancy between what the children were saying and what we were seeing in the classroom. They said they hated things but once they had begun the task they seemed to enjoy themselves. (Old habits die hard.) This is when I began having the students write in a buddy journal, as Brenda had suggested. In this journal they were allowed to express things they disliked, enjoyed, or thought needed to be improved on in the buddy program. It was in this journal that I began seeing that many of the students actually enjoyed taking part in reading buddies. (I gave them a place to have a voice. ^{expand}) They were having difficulty, at times, getting their buddy to listen and work. So we began sharing some of the difficulties and the successes we were having and how to solve some of the problems. The students shared a great deal and began helping each other solve problems. I also shared. Many of the problems the students were having with their grade one buddy were the same problems I had in the classroom. A real sense of community was developing in the classroom.

*more emphasis
on context*

good This picture speaks a thousand words to me. This shows the type of relationships I want the children to have. I want them to feel safe with one another so that they can take risks in their learning. This picture is also an example of the results of our sharing in the classroom. Brittany was having difficulty getting her buddy to focus on the book

My presentation was titled The Benefits of Books and Buddies in a Class of Non-readers. I shared my frustrations about my students attitudes and limited skills at the beginning of the year. I compared the things they were saying at the beginning of the year (I can't read) to their views at the end of the year (Don't tell me that word I can figure it out myself). I compared the students ideas of what reading was and how they developed their understanding throughout the year. I compared their reading ability at the beginning of the year and showed how some of them had grown. My presentation went better than I expected and I feel that what I shared had value for ^{other} teachers who ^{were here} have ^{had} struggling readers in their classrooms.

I returned to school to continue my investigation into action research and what I had done in my classroom. At that time I thought I had conducted action research; however, after reading some of McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead (1996) I realize that I have not conducted a real action research project. I did not go through the full process of action research. I did not systematically investigate my own actions ^{called} or informed action. I also had no preset plans ^{called} or intentional action (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996). However, I do believe that I have grown tremendously from looking back on what ^{Pushing m} transpired in my classroom last year. (Furthermore, it was not until I sat down to write ^{to info} this that I could fully appreciate the value of a reflective journal. A journal would have ^{actio.} helped me tremendously in telling my story. I feel now that there are many gaps in what transpired, in the emotions, the difficulties, and the triumphs.)

This process has led me to many new questions. Prior to taking this course I had decided to examine how I could implement the new curriculum effectively into a split grade 2/3 class. Although this may still be something I will struggle with, I realized that it does not come from inside me. ~~Therefore, I have changed my focus to something that I value~~ ^{because}

It was through talking with Joann that I have decided to continue my focus on community but in a broader context and in a systematic way. Our question is: How can we develop caring individuals whose goals include ways to contribute something positive ^{to} the community (class, school, town) they live in? This time I will, in collaboration with Joann, follow and adapt an action research model and conduct a true action research project. Why is it important for me to do it right? ^{to do research?} What ^{are} the implications in my practice?

- whether ~~of~~ my values come out in my teaching
- Can not get to pedagogical if 4'al is not dealt with (Vicky)

Judged as a beginning teacher & researcher.
* Judged on my growth during this course.

- connect to prof. dev. processes available
- process helpful by reflecting.
- expand more on where I am going.
- tape conversation between Joann & I.
- relate to ICTR handouts
- show significance of conference
- language.