

A. Written report

Section I

College Bound Summer Camp – Educational Image Project
United States
Mount Holyoke College
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Through the use of Digital Storytelling and a career-focused curriculum, the Educational Image Project (EIP) intended to develop the self-awareness and career planning abilities of adult learners (GED students) from Holyoke, MA. EIP also attempted to promote a new, more positive image of adult learners in Holyoke, MA in the way the adult learners themselves choose to define that, with the hope of encouraging other individuals from the community who lack a GED to seek further education.

No other fundraising efforts contributed to this project.

Mainstream college preparation discourse suggests that in order for students to successfully enter college they need training in areas such as time management, study skills, and budgeting. Originally, I intended to follow this discourse. However, early on I realized that while this approach may be quite effective when working with high school students bound for college, adult GED learners require an alternative approach that focuses less on where they are going, and more on where these adults are now and how they got there. Coming to realize the importance of addressing questions of culture and past experiences fundamentally changed the implementation of this summer program. This fundamental change was marked by the changing of the program's original name of "College Bound" to the students' chosen name of "Educational Image Project." This name emphasizes the program's focus on the larger educational journey of these adult learners.

13 GED students completed the entire summer program. Every Tuesday and Thursday evening from 6-8:30PM of July and August, the 13 students, 4 facilitators, and I gathered for class at Gill Technology Center at the Picknelly Family and Adult Education Center located in the heart of downtown Holyoke. Students spent Tuesday evenings creating their own digital stories through a workshop facilitated by Project TOLD, a community outreach project hosted by the regional public broadcasting station, WGBY-Springfield. On Thursday evenings I taught a curriculum that explored students' work values, interests, personality and skills (VIPS). This curriculum integrated community building with constructive, interactive, hands-on learning activities that provided students with space to reflect on their needs and preferences of their career, study, and personal lives. In addition to our weekly classes, students also participated in weekly open work hours, community engagement projects, and excursions. Activities included a tour of the WGBY TV studio and being guests on TRGGR Radio of WMUA 91.1. Additionally, a few students designed and built checkerboards to be used at Holyoke's weekly urban farmers market.

The program concluded with a public Digital Storytelling Showcase at Holyoke Heritage State Park Visitor Center, the central historical education site for the post-industrial city. Approximately 75 people from throughout Western Massachusetts attended. There are already plans to hold an additional two community screenings of the videos. Holyoke's mayoral office has also expressed interest in supporting another digital storytelling project, and in trying to share these videos with other parts of the community. In addition to the sustainability of the digital storytelling project, I will be publishing the EIP curriculum on Creative Commons. I also intend to write an article and present at professional conferences on work force development about this approach to supporting the adult learner population, and to provide ABE educators with an alternative approach to teaching career planning strategies.

Section II

Peace is grounded in story sharing, the honest acts of speaking and listening. In urban, low-income areas like Holyoke, MA, individuals are shockingly under experienced in listening, and consequently in

speaking. There's an overwhelming assumption that no one wants to listen to what you, an under-educated individual, has to say. Therefore, even when something needs to be said for the wellbeing of this individual, or even the larger community, the word remains silent. This cycle of silence becomes embedded within the self of the individuals of these communities, convincing them they have nothing to say or to contribute. Yet, it is only through sharing stories that these individuals are able to work through their struggles and develop inner peace with their pasts. It is through this inner peace that they are able to generate an outer peace, because they have gained the confidence to stand up for themselves in their homes, in their neighborhoods, in their careers and schools, and eventually in the world.

Almost on its own, EIP evolved into a supportive space for the group of students to learn about honest listening, speaking, and sharing. As we learned how to speak about ourselves and our personal and professional preferences and dreams, we simultaneously learned to listen to each other and to exchange insights. One example of this evolution began on the first day of the Digital Storytelling workshop. The facilitator told the group of students, "Every person has a story to tell." Next, as a warm up activity, everyone chose a card with an image on it, then told a story from their lives that related to this image. One student, Carlos, chose the only blank card. He said, "I have no memory. I don't have a history. I don't have any stories to tell." Over the following weeks, I guided this student in an out-of-class project of building a checkerboard. During the hours of working on the project, we engaged in long story sharing conversations. During these conversations I learned that it wasn't that Carlos had no memories, but rather that he chose to deny them because they too vividly reminded him of his mentally and physically abusive past. With each conversation, little by little, he started to chip away at the difficult parts of his history, realizing that he in fact has a history. He began to believe in himself, and he began to open up to the other members of the group. And as he opened up, he saw others start to believe in him, which fostered a never before felt inner peace. On the last day of class, the students discussed how their greatest accomplishment as a group was helping Carlos build his confidence and restore his memory. They saw him grow and realize his potential, encouraging the rest of them to believe in their own potentials. One student even decided he wants to be a mentor for other young men because of his experience supporting Carlos. In summary, as Carlos learned to tell his story and discovered that people wanted to listen to what he had to say and were supportive of his process, he embraced his own experiences, generating an inner peace and strength that rippled into an inner peace and eventually outer peace for the whole group. Now, this group will carry the peace built in our small community into their lives beyond the classroom.

The digital stories the students created also have much potential to encourage story sharing far beyond our classroom, as the stories are now part of the city's historical archive and can be screened for years to come. The students' stories speak to the common realities of many individuals in Holyoke's Latino community. Based on what I observed at our digital storytelling showcase, simply watching their videos opens new spaces for story sharing. And like with Carlos, every story shared generates a long chain of ripples that foster inner and outer peace for a whole community in the long-term.

Prior to this project, I had never realized how important the act of storytelling is for the health of individuals in low-income, urban communities. Where I grew up, people were expected to speak, listen, and exchange. To my surprise, this expectation exists in a very different form in Holyoke. I attribute this fault of communication skills to an education system that has continuously marginalized and under-supported students like those in my program. My experiences through the Davis Project for Peace has reinforced my belief that the learning of authentic communication, or dialogue, is critical for empowering students to be better learners and to envision their own bright personal and professional futures. Once they claim their own pasts, they feel capable to create their own paths and eventually stable, peaceful environments for themselves and their community.

"My students of the Educational Image Project have shown me the power and necessity of creating spaces for sharing stories. The honest exchanging of our stories of struggles and triumphs is perhaps the most powerful tool for inspiring individuals to achieve empowered and peaceful futures in their personal

and professional lives. I now want to dedicate the rest of my life to fostering these sorts of learning communities for adult students.” - Hilary Pollan

B. Photography

- 1) Educational Image Project (EIP) students working on a class activity on the brainstorming process.
- 2) Students and facilitators pose in front of Holyoke’s City Hall before the EIP Digital Storytelling Showcase.
- 3) Empowered EIP student, Neftaly, speaks to the digital storytelling showcase audience about his transformational experience in the EIP and digital storytelling workshop.

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