

## WRITING THE RIVER

A course offered to teachers in the Lamoille River Basin by Geoff Gevalt, Young Writers Project and Amy Demarest, Our Curriculum Matters

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### **Our Essential Question: What are the stories of the Lamoille River Watershed that we should preserve, create and share with our community?**

The graduate-level practicum course for (Grades 4-12) teachers will explore the many ways that students can learn and write about the Lamoille River. Our work will be focused on the participants classroom and student writing. We will explore the opportunities for student voice in the Lamoille River Watershed and work collaboratively to discover the power of writing in place. The Website, funded and maintained by YWP, will be open to participants throughout the course and serve as a collaborative work environment during the school year 2010-2011. With its public launch in June 2011, the site will provide an authentic community resource to share river's history, ecology, human accomplishments and artistic expressions presented by students in the watershed.

### Essential Understandings:

- Writing for a real purpose about places that are familiar to students and the creative use of technology engages students in school, increases traditional academic achievement and fosters real-world interests, talents and possibilities.
- The river is a construct for multiple writing and alternate forms of expression.
- Stories or narrative situated in place can integrate subjects, data and experience.
- 21<sup>st</sup> century technology can enhance the preservation, creation and sharing of these stories.
- Collaboration among peers and community partners enriches teaching and learning.

### **MEETING TIMES:**

INTRODUCTION TO RIVER: *9am-4pm-Wednesday, August 18: Explore the Watershed*

TECHNOLOGY BASICS WORKSHOP: *10am-2pm-Saturday, Sept 25 (YWP, Winooski)*

CLASS MEETINGS THROUGHOUT YEAR: *Workshop-style Collaborative Time*

Tuesdays 4-6:30; Peoples Academy in Morrisville. (Some classes may meet downriver).

October 5, 12 ; November 9, 10; December 7; January 11, 25; February 8; March 8, 22

and final class in June TBA. (Class dates/times may be adjusted to participants and task.)

**THE COURSE:** In **Writing the River** teachers will have the opportunity to work in a yearlong collaboratively structured setting to support their work with students as they explore ways to write about the Lamoille River. Teachers will experience and deepen their understanding of:

- ❖ The foundations of place-based education
- ❖ The idea of narrative as academic construct (ie exploring the dimensions of story)
- ❖ Practical and experiential learning with 21<sup>st</sup> century technology skills
- ❖ Collaborating, learning and implementing new skills and approaches to interdisciplinary and single subject writing experiences
- ❖ Creating a Lamoille River Watershed Website that will serve as a:
  - private collaborative working environment for teachers and students
  - multimedia showcase for completed student work
  - community resource for learning and protecting the Lamoille River
  - platform for sharing and generating new information.

#### Teacher Assignments and Learning Activities

Two main parts to course work (teacher tech tool kit and teacher pedagogy )

#### **21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY TECHNOLOGY TRAINING AND RESOURCES**

**Teachers in the course will have the opportunity to build a “toolkit” to help students create, revise and share information on the Web. Specific skills highlighted will be:**

- Gather information in digital formats, such as images, historical documents, audio and video;
- Create Web-based material -- initially in a private online setting -- where students can engage in peer-to-peer collaboration, critique and revision;
- Engage in interviewing and research gathering;
- Create audiocasts, image galleries, slideshows and videos;
- Use digital mapping programs; and
- Build community on the Web.

“Coaching” from Geoff Gevalt regarding individual needs and projects/tech training

#### **PLACE BASED LEARNING/TEACHER AS REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER**

**Teachers in the course will have the opportunity to learn about place-based education and consider ways that they can situate the essential understandings of their discipline (social studies, science, language arts, art, math) in local places.**

**Learning activities include:**

- Readings about place-based education and learning in place
- Dialogue about readings and challenges of implementation
- Structured peer review/sharing ideas for structuring learning in places
- Experiences in the Lamoille River with community partners to model writing the river.

“Coaching” from Amy Demarest regarding individual needs and projects

## Class Meetings

Meeting #1: Date to be determined. (7 hours): A day of introduction and exploration to the watershed.

FOCUS: *What is place-based education and the power and possibility of writing in place?*

Visit different sites on the River, model writing in place. Introduce website possibilities and course expectations. Explore the ideas of stories and the wide breadth of curricular possibilities: history stories, science stories, human expression and ethnography.

Meeting #2: Date to be determined. (4 hours): A day to establish foundations of new technology learning.

FOCUS: *What are some basic technology skills that will get us started and how will technology support our work as we go through this process?*

Use needs assessment, workshop style to introduce and set goals on new technology learning.

## Meetings During Year

FALL-SPRING: 10 class meetings—Tech and Curriculum Collaborative Workshop on Tuesdays at Peoples Academy in Morrisville (4-6:30) (25 hours)

## On-site Support from Instructors/single topic collaboration

At certain times there will be a need for teachers to meet in small groups/with one of the instructors. A minimum of 5 hours is allotted for this work.

ON-SITE/CURRICULUM PLANNING/TECH SUPPORT/CONFERENCE (5 hours)

Final Class: 4-7 Public Share of Work and Website (June, 2011) (3 hours)

TOTAL: 44 hours (Dates and Times may be adjusted to accommodate participants and task.

## Common Texts and Readings

**Umphey, Michael. *The Power of Community-centered Education: Teaching as a Craft of Place.* Rowman and Littlefield: 2007.**

**Boss, S. & Krauss, J. (2007) *Re-inventing Project-Based Learning: Your Field Guide to Real-World Projects in the Digital Age.* International Society for Technology in Education. Eugene, Oregon.**

Campano, G. (2007). Honoring Student Stories. *Educational Leadership*, October.

Cochrane, C. (2004). Landscapes for Learning. *Educational Leadership*, September.

Demarest, A. (1997) Field Trips. In *This Lake Alive!* VT: Shelburne Farms.

Dufour, R. (2004). What is a Professional Learning Community? *Educational Leadership*, May.

Elder, J. (1998). Teaching at the Edge. In *Stories in the Land.* Great Barrington, MA: Orion.

Levy, S. (2008). The Power of Audience. *Educational Leadership*, November.

Moulds, P. (2003/2004). Rich Tasks. *Educational Leadership*, December/January.

Rosenburg, J. & Nabhan, G. (1997). Where Ancient Stories Guide Children Home. *Natural History*, October.

Vermont Department of Education (2002) *Vermont Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities*, Montpelier, VT.

Smith, G. (2002). Place-based Education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, April.

Tanner, C. (2001). Into the Woods, Wetlands, and Prairies. *Educational Leadership*, April.

### **TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES/Grading**

- ✚ Demonstrates mastery and implementation of fundamental technology skills.
- ✚ Demonstrates ability to integrate local place and writing
- ✚ Share student work in public website
- ✚ Engages in Collaborative workshop to explore and implement essential question.
- ✚ Attends and participates in class and technology workshops.
- ✚ Conducts individually designed reading list to support personal goals
- ✚ Responds in writing both formally and in personal reflection throughout course.

#### **Technology Toolkit.....30 pts**

Teacher participates and masters a minimum of “new learning” related to the implementation of technology in the classroom.

Specific Goals related to mastery of technology will be differentiated according to individual needs of student. Criteria will be set in first two class meetings and revisited during year.

#### **Collaborative Process.....30 pts**

Teachers participate in the ongoing collaborative process of learning with other teachers and conducting self-designed learning opportunities to deepen personal implementation of essential question.

Self-assessment and ongoing feedback from instructors during year.

#### **Writing and Reflection.....20 pts**

Teachers write both formally and informally on readings, common experiences and their emerging new understanding of essential question.

Three short papers due (3-5 pages)...10 pts

Personal Reflection and ongoing response in writing....10 pts

#### **Readings and Inquiry.....20 pts**

Teachers complete assigned readings and come to class prepared to discuss. Teachers design individual reading list and respond and share throughout year.

Common Texts.....10 pts

Individual Readings....10 pts

### **Additional Readings and Resources**

Berger, R. (2003) *An ethic of excellence: Building a culture of craftsmanship with students*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Brooke, R. (2003). *Rural voices: Place-conscious education and the teaching of writing*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Brooks, J., Libresco, & A. Plonczak, I. (2007). Spaces of Liberty: Battling the New Soft Bigotry of NCLB. *Phi Delta Kappan*, June.
- Demarest, A. (1997). *This lake alive! An interdisciplinary handbook for teaching and learning about the Lake Champlain Basin*. Shelburne, VT: Shelburne Farms.
- Gruenewald, D., & Smith, G. (Eds.). (2008b). *Place-based education in the global age: Local Diversity*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Taylor & Francis Group, LLC.
- Hart, R. (1997). *Children's participation: The theory and practice of involving young citizens in community development and environmental care*. London: Earthscan.
- Little, J.W., Gearhart, M., Curry, M., & Kafka, J. (2003). Looking at student work for teacher learning, teacher community, and school reform. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 85(3), 184-192.
- Louv, R. (2005). *Last child in the woods: Saving our children from nature-deficient disorder*. Chapel Hill, NC: Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill.
- Monke, L. (2006). Unplugged schools. *Orion*, 26(5), 18-25.
- Rous, E.W. (2000) *Literature and the Land: Reading and Writing for Environmental Literacy*, 7-12. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.
- Sobel, D. (2003). *Place-based education*. Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society.
- Westheimer, J., & Kahne, J. (2003). Reconnecting education to democracy: Democratic dialogues. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 85(1), 9-14.
- Wiggins, G., & McTighe J. (2005). *Understanding by design* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Wigginton, E. (1985). *Sometimes a shining moment: The foxfire experience*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Press/Doubleday.