

April 2, 2011 workshop, Hull House Museum Chicago

Deepening the Inquiry

"And something weird is goin on, I can feel it in my chest."

-Toni Cade Bambara, "The Lesson"

Where does learning take place in our lives? Where is learning taking place within ourselves? How do others spark our learning, and what are the processes by which learning grows? These were a few of the many questions that moved through the room in the second workshop of the Teachers' Center for Democratic Inquiry, held April 2, 2011 at Jane Addams Hull House Museum in Chicago.

The TIP workshops of 2010-2011 were designed to bring together teachers from a wide variety of school contexts to reflect on practice and imagine how teachers' ongoing learning can contribute to education as a sustaining and sustainable life. The first workshop centered around four processes, three of which were processes of reflection based in dialogue: Civic Reflection; Matrix Leadership; Descriptive Review. The fourth element of the first workshop was envisioning the Center. The TIP conveners then worked with the ideas, perspectives, and stories shared in the first workshop to develop a business plan and to plan for a second workshop, focused on delving more deeply into teachers' questions about their own learning and about the relationship between teachers and students.

"Teaching... has to be diffused in a social atmosphere, information must be held in solution, in a medium of fellowship and good will.... It is needless to say that a Settlement is a protest against a restricted view of education."

- Jane Addams

It was important for the conveners of the Teachers' Inquiry Project that the Spring Workshop, "Education: Deepening the Inquiry," was held in the original Settlement Dining Hall of the Jane Addams Hull House Museum. Jane Addams' work was a key inspiration for TIP planners, and the TIP workshop was designed to set reflection within the "social atmosphere" that supports, challenges, and helps to clarify the work of teachers.

"Change comes from inside."

- TIP Spring workshop participant

We began with a discussion facilitated by Adam and Kelli of the Project on Civic Reflection. Civic Reflection on Toni Cade Bambara's "The Lesson" provided a good space for exploring the contexts of learning. We discussed experiential education and school structures and the relationship between educational objectives and unintended consequences. We argued over the intersections of individual learning and political education and the impact of the race of the teachers and students in the classroom. We noticed who is heard in the classroom and how they get heard, and tried to notice who doesn't get heard.

"Does all inquiry ultimately become self-inquiry? To solve a given problem you have to turn back to yourself and your values."

- TIP Spring workshop participant

After a hearty lunch of soul food, generously furnished by the McCormick Foundation and De Paul University School of Education, we re-gathered in small groups to share stories of inquiry. Joan designed this Descriptive Review process to enable us to listen to one another's recollections and to watch the patterns that emerged within and between the stories. We discovered anew the riskiness of inquiry, the personal investment that makes it both urgent and unwieldy. While inquiry often seems fraught with

danger, groping in fields of uncertainty and experimentation in challenging authoritative sources of knowledge, even more dangerous is the suppression of the inquiry.

"Empowerment is the ability to pursue questions about your interests."

- TIP Spring workshop participant

We ended the day with Joby and Shanti facilitating a discussion on the implications of reflection for learning. We explored questions about applications of teacher inquiry to students' learning, the limits of institutionalized schooling, the development of the character of the teacher and the development of the student's character, and the responsibility of the teacher in relation to student needs and society's needs.

And the explorations continue! TIP will be running workshops and seminars next year - we'll keep you posted, and please keep us posted as to how you or your school or organization would like to be involved.

Joby, Joan, Kelli, Shanti, and Adam