A Venture in Native American Shield Making

Mary Margaret Hinojosa

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A VENTURE IN NATIVE AMERICAN SHIELD MAKING

By

Mary Margaret Hinojosa

B. S. in Elementary Education, Western Montana College, Dillon, MT, 1988
B. S. in Art, Western Montana College, Dillon, MT, 1988

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Approved by:

Dr. David A. Strobel, Dean
Graduate School

Dr. Randy Bolton- Chair
Fine Arts

Dr. James Kriley, Committee Member
Fine Arts

Dorothy Morrison
Fine Arts
Change in Focus

Chairperson: Dr. Randy Bolton

Our school district has an exceptionally low rate of parental involvement in the educational process of our students. Establishing a “Parent Corner” in the lobby of our school would aid in the solution of this dilemma. What a perfect undertaking for a final project. The intent of this project would be to make parents feel welcome, comfortable and a part of their child’s educational experience.

From the beginning it was apparent things were not going to work out as planned. Some items have been implemented, while others changed over the course of time with differing ideas, lack of commitment, change in leadership and school politics. There was no focus on a philosophy, research or an ongoing plan. The other person involved in the project was replaced by someone else who did not support the idea. Their interest was in developing the Indian Education for All and Character Education curriculums. Integrating these two curriculums into the advisory class changed the focus of the project. The Native American shield project tied into the “Parent Corner” and made a more hospitable and culturally welcoming environment for parents and students.

The “Parent Corner” is now a reality. Walking into the Poplar Middle School lobby you immediately see the results of the project. A panorama of native art work greets the eyes. Fourteen Native American shields hang in a colorful array, welcoming all who enter. Many positive comments have been heard about the shields and the “Parent Corner”. Through the “Parent Corner” and the shield project Poplar Middle School is making a significant effort to bring together parents, families, educators and the community in a cooperative effort to build better relationships through understanding and culture awareness.
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"I learned the buffalo is mother earth. My shield has the buffalo with the world inside to show his sacred responsibilities. This project taught me a lot about my culture. I think it is good to learn about it."
Planning

A committee of middle school teachers created a curriculum for advisory time in Poplar Middle School. This committee was comprised of nine teachers, at least one from each grade level, three specials teachers and other interested parties. The committee’s job was a multi-faceted task involving the incorporation of numerous things into a thirty-five minute time frame.

Indian Education for All requirements needed to be included in the school’s Character Education Program that was the basis of the advisory curriculum. In addition, time needed to be allotted for game day on Thursdays and a school wide assembly on Monday mornings. With these two days utilized, there were three class periods of thirty minutes each per week for the implementation of the new curriculum. In retrospect, taking into account the various components required for the job, the task seemed to be practically impossible. The committee was diligent, creative and motivated, brainstorming many possibilities.

Consideration of ideas from all the committee members resulted in many possibilities that were listed on a chart and discussed. It was during this phase that a key plan for each grade level evolved. Each grade level was assigned a section of character education to concentrate
their efforts on. The assignment for the fifth and sixth grades was to do character education lessons and projects that related to each person as an individual. Seventh grade teachers were to involve their grade level in activities that focused on bringing character education into the middle school setting. Lessons and activities that would involve community outreach became the focus for the eighth grade. After deciding what each grade would be working, respective groups met together to focus on a plan for that grade level.

Work with the eighth grade group would coincide with establishing a parent connection since working with the community was one of the goals. It was time to devise a plan that would accomplish the melding of the two aspects of the curriculum. The first idea was to divide the fourteen character traits so there were certain areas of concentration for each month. The month of September’s plan was to introduce all of the character traits and explain the project we would be doing. Each of the other months was assigned two character traits except the month of May. This month would be used to review and wrap up the year.
The schedule worked out like this:

October: Respect and caring
November: Honesty and integrity
December: Humanity and goal setting
January: Responsibility and patience
February: Courage and self-control
March: Perseverance and service
April: Cooperation and self-esteem

Numerous and varied ideas came out of the group’s planning sections. These ideas were mostly centered on doing a lesson and a project for each trait in isolation. An example of this would be making something to take to the local rest home exhibiting the character trait caring. These projects were more time consuming and involved more planning than teachers wanted to do.

Making character education posters was a suggestion most of the team thought was a good idea. The students could research and incorporate Native American symbols and designs on the posters and hang them out in the community. The downside of the poster idea was it has been overused and kids have already made many projects of this sort. A more artistic, meaningful and long-lasting approach to the
project was desired. Discussion varied on ways to accomplish this proposal. Making signs painted on wood was a suggestion that had its possibilities, but again satisfaction with this idea was incomplete.

During break I went into the art room. While sitting down I looked up and was confronted with the perfect answer to the dilemma. At the back of the art room was a display of mandalas with a Native American motif. Contemplating these works of art my thoughts were on how we could incorporate something like them into our project.

The circular shape appealed to me since we tend to use square or rectangular signs more and because the circle is a sacred symbol to the Native Americans on our reservation. Words of Sioux Holy Man, Black Elk, state “. . . an Indian does everything in a circle and that is because the power of the world always works in circles . . .”1 Reflecting back on how some students were helped researching designs for the mandalas I remembered looking at some Native American war shields. Shields! That was it! Character education signs could be made in the form of Native American shields. What a unique, cultural, artistic and meaningful way to display the character traits throughout our community. The intent of the project would be two fold, to teach the curriculum and give the students an
opportunity to express themselves culturally through an artistic avenue.

The inspiration was met with great enthusiasm. Actually some people were a little over enthusiastic by planning to make a set of shields for twelve businesses and each of the three schools. That was a total of two hundred ten shields to be made by the eighth grade. Broken down into parts the task could be accomplished. Each class would make two shields for the two character traits that were being studied during that month. One shield a week seemed like a reasonable goal.

The shield project was the perfect vehicle to integrate the Indian Education for All requirements into the advisory classes. We fit our project under essential understanding 1 of the Montana Indian Education for All Curriculum which states, “There is great diversity among the 12 tribal Nations of Montana in their languages, cultures, histories, and governments. Each Nation has a distinct and unique cultural heritage that contributes to modern Montana.”

Each advisory class was assigned one of the seven Montana reservations and researched that particular tribe’s artistic designs and symbols to incorporate onto their shields. Each month we traded reservations so that every
advisory class had the chance to learn about each tribe’s different designs. Learning about the each of the tribes in Montana is one of the main objectives that needed to be met. Another objective was to expose students to their native language. With this in mind the Dakota word as well as the English word was used on the shields.

Facilitating a project of this magnitude created apprehension about the willingness of the other teachers to follow through with such an extensive, rigorous and artistic project. The enthusiasm of the group was wonderful, but having had experience working with similar groups doubt about whether it would last was a concern. The other foreseeable problem was the other teachers were not art teachers and didn’t really have much experience or any idea what to expect.
“At first I didn’t want to make a shield. I didn’t even try for quite a while. When I finally started, the more I worked the better I liked it. In the end I was sad the project was over. I like this shield the best because it is a design off of my grandmother’s moccasins.”
Starting out the year with this plan was challenging and rigorous. I had one month to plan the implementation of the project. My job was to oversee obtaining supplies, provide instruction, pass out lists of businesses to contact, find out the Dakota words and teach the teachers how to make the shields.

The first challenge was to decide on the materials to make the shields. Rawhide was just too expensive for the number of shields that were going too made. The shields should be as realistic as possible and several different kinds of materials were considered. The surface needed to accept paint and not bleed, be stretched without wrinkling or tearing and look somewhat like rawhide. Using some sort of paper or cardboard was my first inclination. The drawback with this medium was it ripped when put on the frame, holes tore out, durability issues and it did not look enough like rawhide. The positives of using paper were the price was minimal and it wouldn’t be costly to start over if you made mistakes. The next idea was to use some sort of cloth, for example faux leather. When tested with paint and markers they bled. Vinyl could be used providing the price was not prohibitive. The weight,
surface and color of the vinyl all seemed to be just right. The vinyl came in a width of 60” making it possible to get four 19” diameter shields out of one yard for a cost of $2.25 per shield. That seemed to be a reasonable cost and would fit into the budget.

Now that the material was selected a choice of material for the frame was left. Originally the plan was to use willows and construct hoops. It was not feasible to make hoops due to the substantial number of frames needed. The search for a suitable wooden ring resulted in either a high cost, inferior quality or a smaller ring size than desired. The only alternative was to use brass craft rings. This solution posed no problems since they came in the right size, were strong enough and the cost was within the budget.

Materials were purchased for the first month’s shields and orders placed for the rest of what would be needed for the entire project. The whole process of finding the right materials was made easy because they could be obtained through the Ben Franklin Store only twenty-two miles away and they were willing to order what was needed.

Assembling a prototype was the next step. The vinyl posed a hindrance when it did not bend over the hoop smoothly and stitching it on tight enough to hold it firmly
ripped out the holes. Fortunately the task could be accomplished by stitching a circular piece of vinyl inside the hoop like a hide stretcher. This procedure left the bare brass ring showing which was undesirable. At this point it became apparent, for esthetic purposes, it would look better to wrap the hoops with yarn or material. Finally all of the construction questions were answered and the prototype was finished.

Due to the help of the Dakota language teacher, Gabe Plante, we were able to translate the character trait works into Dakota. Mr. Plante was very excited about the project and had several suggestions to enhance it. One of these suggestions was to have an elder come and talk to the students about the medicine wheel, its colors and meaning. His suggestion was implemented further along in the project.

All of the eighth grade advisory classes assembled in the gym and were given instructions on how to make their shields. The teachers explained the expectations of each advisory group and questions were answered. The list of businesses where the shields would go, the list of Dakota words, and the materials for the shields were handed out to each group and the students were ready to start the project.
“I wanted to do something really simple so I could get done fast. I was not into doing these shield things anyway. Mrs. Hinojosa said that simple designs are sometimes the most effective. She sure was right because when my shield was done I loved it. I was kind of mad that I couldn’t take it home. It is funny that I chose to do a bear paw because it stands for courage. It took a lot of courage for me to do this shield. The elders said that shields have powers and I believe that this shield is telling me to have courage in my life because I have a lot of not too good things happening right now.”
October

Respect and caring were the character trait words each advisory group worked on this month. Each advisory class had between 7 and 12 students. In order to complete the shields the students would need to work in groups. The first step of the project was to make a thumbnail sketch of their shield utilizing designs and symbols researched about their group’s selected tribe. Students sometimes have a hard time with the brainstorming process and they want to give up right away. The resources available were extremely limited and some groups could not find information specific to their assigned tribe. To help solve this dilemma some books were loaned to us from the high school and Fort Peck Community College Library.

Several elders came to speak about designs, symbols and the significance of a shield. They agreed with Robert H. Lowie’s statement, “Dakota shields were invested with protective power mainly because of the symbolic designs and trimmings on them.” They encouraged the students to look inside themselves and find thoughts and feelings that could be represented in a symbolic form. They talked about how a shield could be used to represent things that the maker would like to experience and develop throughout their lives. Examples of some symbols that could depict the
character trait words were given. For instance the bear represents courage, beaver symbolizes perseverance and the wolf signifies cooperation. Meaning for these symbols can come from traditions or it can also come from what a person feels inside. Illustrations and examples of Sioux beadwork and quillwork were shown and the design elements discussed.

The advisory class in the art room researched and collected several examples of Nez Perce beadwork. Each student made several thumbnail sketches and then picked the sketch they liked best. The final design idea came from a beaded bag done by the Nez Perce tribe depicting a common motif from their tribe, a stylized rose. The project was off to a good start.

It didn’t take long to discern a major flaw in the planning of the assignment. While only one person could paint on a shield at a time the rest of the students were left with nothing to do. Efforts to engage them in alternative lessons on character education or research other designs proved to be unsuccessful because no one wanted to do class work while others got to paint.

A conference was held with the other eighth grade advisory teachers and they had similar problems. The resolution was to not worry so much about what trait was
being studied that month, but to assign a shield to every student to work on. When it was all worked out each student was responsible for three shields in order to make the right number of shields corresponding to the master list of businesses.
“My favorite colors are turquoise, red and yellow so I wanted to put them into my design. The bear is my grandfather’s totem and I wanted to honor him by making this shield with a bear on it. My grandfather has a lot of courage in his life. When I showed him the shield I made he said he wants me to make this design on his new dance outfit. This project was really fun and I want to stay in eighth grade so I can make more shields.”
November

The first two shields were complete and we needed supplies. At the very least we would need supplies for each student to have one round of vinyl. The order was not here yet and we needed to proceed. To facilitate this gap in supplies, students were directed to make a detailed plan or thumbnail sketches for their three shields assuming that supplies would arrive fairly soon. After waiting for three weeks, the orders were checked on and assurance was given that they would arrive in a week or so. Some of the hoops came, but the rest were put on back order. The vinyl, come to find out, was never ordered due to a lack of communication with the store’s department head and the manager. In the mean time the month of November was nearly over. Students had their designs, but we had no vinyl.

Poplar is located in a remote corner of the state and access to stores involves many miles of travel. A phone call to Williston, ND, only seventy-five miles away, revealed that Walmart did not carry the kind of vinyl which was needed. Meanwhile one of the teachers was going to Billings. This was lucky because Billings is 250 miles from Poplar and to drive there just to get vinyl would be a cost not included in the budget and would not be approved.
After many phone calls to different craft and fabric stores vinyl was finally found that would work except the color was much lighter than the original. Luckily it turned out to be more satisfactory to work with. Permanent markers could be used instead of paint. This solved the problem of having paint messes in classrooms. Enough vinyl was purchased to get us through until we received the other order. I was reluctant to cancel the original order for several reasons. First the order was supposed to be here soon; second it’s nice to do business locally when possible and lastly our purchase order system would be messed up, causing a paperwork nightmare, if I cancelled.
“When we started this project I thought it was really dumb. I listened to my friends and how dumb they thought it was. Mrs. Hinojosa heard all the negativity, but she just kept encouraging and working with us. Even though I don’t want to do another project like this I am glad I completed my shield and learned about my culture. When I see the shields hanging in the foyer I am glad I was part of the project.”

December
Word eventually came that the vinyl was on back order and the hoops would not arrive until the middle of February. The feasibility of getting this project done was going to be much more difficult than it seemed at first. Not only were the supplies hard to obtain, but students and teachers were not motivated. Another difficulty that surfaced during this month was that the advisory time was being used for other activities and the holidays were just around the corner.

For the rest of the month the project was more or less put on hold until after Christmas vacation. In the interim another company supplied the vinyl and a search for more hoops was made. It seems that not too many companies carry the 19 inch brass hoops. Every place that had them did not have a significant amount of this size to make a difference. It would be a horrendous task to order two hundred and ten hoops six, ten or twenty at a time through the school’s purchase order policies. Hopefully the ones we ordered would come in soon.
“Horses are my favorite animal. I have my own horse and know that you must use honesty when dealing with him because he can tell when you lie. If you say something is safe to do and it is not he might shy away or try and buck you off. Honesty is a really important trait to have in life. I am happy we studied how to live and learned some of our culture.”
January

Students resumed rendering their designs on the vinyl. No shields could be completed due to the lack of the hoops. After making several phone calls a supply of 30 more hoops could be obtained if it was possible to use an 18 inch one instead of the original 19 inch. One inch of circumference would not make a significant difference in the finished product. All that would have to be done to accommodate for this change would be to make slightly smaller rounds of vinyl.

Motivating students was still a problem for some teachers. Several just gave up and didn’t continue with the project. Others held to the objective that the projects needed to be completed in order to receive a passing grade for advisory class. There was no doubt that the students in the art room knew what was expected and they rose to the occasion. Joining in and working alongside of them inspired them to persevere. The other motivating factor was that once several shields were completed and the results of their work could be seen they were excited to try another idea.

A very shy and withdrawn student became so involved in the project she did seven shields. This was the only class
where she would do any kind of work. Her artistic talents and work ethic helped her execute some of the most unique and beautiful shields. As a teacher it is always a fulfilling experience when you can reach a student who otherwise is not successful. Another student who attended the after school program and was not even in the advisory class became interested in the shields. He didn’t want to make a shield, but he asked if he could submit some of his own designs for the other students to use. This young man was a very talented artist and several students used his designs. When these shields were completed and hanging his usually dark and sad face lit up and you could tell he was proud to be included in the project.
“Howling like a wolf is the way I feel sometimes. That is how I felt when I had to do this project. I can’t do art, but Mrs. Hinojosa helped me. I think my shield is really awesome. Now I feel better about doing something I haven’t done before. We made the tracks leading out from the circle showing that our bad feelings can come out and go away.”
February

Students are getting tired of working on shields. In order to help alleviate this situation tribal elder Shep Ferguson was brought in to talk to the students about the medicine wheel. This is an important culturally significant symbol to the tribes on the Fort Peck Indian Reservation. Many of the students did not know the right way to present the colors or their symbolic representation. Students had a nice change of pace by making rawhide medicine wheel necklaces. Several students corrected the way they had the medicine wheel symbol on their shields and others decided to include it in their designs.

By the end of February two thirds of the shields should have been made. There were no where near that many completed. The lack of professionalism exhibited by some teachers in completing an assigned task was appalling. They left everything up to the students and did not try different strategies to motivate them. Personally one of the biggest challenges was not to have a negative attitude toward these teachers. Through perseverance, one of the character traits, and rigorous work there were several teachers who were instrumental in making the project a partial success and continued to progress with the project.
“During this project I needed lots of patience. Sometimes I felt like I was trampled by a herd of buffalo. When the students saw this shield they thought it was “there” and it helped to inspire them.”
March

Time was getting short and it was agreed that for some groups they would need to concentrate on getting at least one set of shields finished. Some students in the art room group agreed to make extras. This was a surprise considering the lack of enthusiasm and the amount of complaining that had been heard at the beginning of the project. Several students even wanted to make other shields to take home. At last there was some positive feedback from the students.

Work continued at a faster pace throughout the month. Students were on task more of the time, more focused and seemed genuinely interested in completing the sets that were started. The new goal was to finish eight of the original fifteen sets. This amount was just over half of what had been planned. In retrospect this should have probably been our original goal. At first such a reduction was discouraging considering how much planning and effort went into the project.
“Making the shields was the only thing I wanted to do at school. I don’t like school. When we got to do these shields I liked it better. The bears on my shield represent people and the respect we need to show each other. Not many people show me respect. They just think I am shy and dumb.”
April

The whole atmosphere of the middle school’s lobby has changed by hanging the shields. Instead of a conglomerate of assorted posters, notices and pictures there is a well executed series of artwork adorning the wall. The addition of the shields to the “Parent Corner” gives the entire room an ambiance of culture, comfort and welcome. It was an enormous relief to actually have this part of the project come to an end. The results have caused many people to pause and study the students’ achievements. Parents, teachers, visitors and students have only positive comments to make.
“For me this was a stupid project. I would like to spend time talking to my friends. When I realized that we could keep talking while we worked it helped. I chose to use the turtle and the lizard. They represent male and female spirits in my culture. We have a responsibility to respect each other. My shield turned out way better than I thought it would and I learned that doing something new can turn out okay.”
May

The final push to culminate the shield project came quickly. Several teachers put in extra time, pitched in and helped with the artwork itself and made sure their shield sets were finished. Now the final step was to hang the results of the year long project in the selected places. The shields were put up in the following buildings:

Fort Peck Community College
Poplar Elementary School
Poplar Middle School
Poplar High School
Fort Peck Tribal Building
Wally’s Grocery Store
Independence Bank, and
T. J.’s Quick Stop

The community now has a striking arrangement of outstanding, meaningful and long lasting works of art in eight different places.
“I learned that humility is that every different kind of person is important. My design is one I just liked. This project was okay, but I would not want to do it again. The shields do look kinda cool out in the foyer.”
Results and Assessments

The outcomes of the shield project are evident by the placement of the shields out in the community. Even though the amount of shields completed was not the original number. There were enough displayed that people took notice.

The Fort Peck Tribal Counsel liked the project so well they officially adopted the fourteen character trait words to be utilized in other similar projects throughout the reservation. They expressed how relevant to our young peoples lives, culture and education projects of this nature are. Bringing the tribes, students, parents and school closer together in an effort to better ourselves was appreciated.

An elder was sitting in the “Parent Corner” and commented on how nice the shields were. She introduced herself as the director of the Spotted Bull Treatment Center. During our conversation she mentioned how much she would like to have a set of shields for the center. There were about five or six shields left over and I said she could have those. I told her that it would be a pleasure to work together with some of her clients and complete the set this fall when school resumed.
One of the teachers in our district is also the mayor of Poplar. She stopped me one day and asked if there was a possibility she could get a set of shields for the city offices. I explained we had already put up the ones we had made and didn’t have any more. From this experience I came to the realization that we could continue with the project. Just because the school year was over didn’t mean we had to stop forever. The project could continue on as requests were made. The exciting part about this is that the original goal could still be met.

Gabe Plante, the Dakota language teacher, took pictures of all the shields and is going to include them in his Dakota language program. We discussed making a character trait coloring book using the shield designs. He stressed the need for the Character Education Program in all classes and was impressed with how the project meets some of the Indian Education for All curriculum. Working with Gabe has always been a pleasure. Learning about the Dakota language and developing projects to integrate it into the classroom is a common goal.

The district’s secretary came up with the idea of using pictures of the shields on the school calendar. Every year they use the same boring pictures and she agreed
we could really enhance the calendar by including pictures of the students work.

One of the shields appealed to the principal for a school logo. The student was asked if we could adapt the design for use as the official Poplar Middle School logo. The student was surprised and pleased to have had their design selected for this purpose and willingly agreed to let us use it. These logos are now an integral part of the school. Coupled with the school mission statement and the school motto they are displayed in every classroom, used as letterhead, and a special matted and framed version hangs in the “Parent Corner”.

Working on a project like this was new to the students. They needed encouragement, understanding and positive role models. As their teacher my responsibility was to guide my students through this project and help them grow emotionally, culturally and academically. This was the risk and rigor of the project, not just to complete a set of shields. The character traits are not just words to put on display, but to be considered part of everyday life. Getting this across to the students was a difficult task. There was a major difference in my students form the beginning to the end. During the course of the project their confidence grew, cultural awareness was broadened and
a sense of pride was developed. Working everyday in a more relaxed atmosphere allowed for many and varied conversations. Students began to reveal themselves in a way they had never done in the past. We discussed, in a very informal situation, the events in their lives. Without them realizing it we discussed the whole Character Education Program. As the facilitator, counselor, teacher and artist I was amazed and delighted things worked out this way. I believe a difference was made in their lives, education and development.

When I began this project I knew some of the students would not want to participate. One of the great things that came out of doing the shields was that what started out for some as a negative turned into a positive as the project progressed. Even though some didn’t want to do it again they were satisfied with the results and learned something.

The statements the students made after we completed the project reveled to me a wealth of understanding that I did not have before. This was the final icing on an already excellent project. Having each student tell me and actually write down what they said made a great impact on how I remember the project. Writing down their comments made them much more real and personal; not just a casual
conversation that one would forget in a few hours. Now I can look back, read and reflect on what was actually said rather than rely on my memory.

It was significant to me that most of the students said they learned about their culture. This was one of the major objectives of the whole project. Having students say that they were proud to have been a part of the experience gave me an immense feeling of accomplishment as a teacher. When students brought designs in from home and wanted to incorporate them it made yet another tie to the parents.

My advisory group demonstrated their growth in character by planning a breakfast for parents. The “Parent Corner” was used to hold the gathering. Students made invitations, planned and cooked the food, and cleaned up. Each parent was presented with a poem based on five of the character traits. An elder came in to talk about the importance of getting an education and told some traditional stories. All who were involved were impressed with the efforts of the students to bring parents into the educational setting and include their culture.

Qualities taught in the Character Education Program were evident when the students hosted a benefit for families whose houses had burned. They had the idea, planned everything and did all the work. The “Parent
Corner” was used to host an Indian taco dinner and art auction. The whole undertaking was a great success and three families received a sizeable check. There was much discussion around the community about how awesome the students were to accomplish a project of this kind.
“Turtles can hide in their shell and are protected. I want to hide in my shell sometimes. Caring people keep me from hiding. This project was hard and I wanted to quit. Now am finished I am happy with it.”
Changes in the Teacher/Artist

My own fears about this project had to do mainly with the other teachers. Working with peers is not something I have done very often. Insecurity and lack of confidence plagued my every thought. The risk of being the one to facilitate the project was a big challenge. Like my students, as the project proceeded my confidence grew. I saw that as a teacher I was not going to let the setbacks get me down. When I first realized that some of the teachers were just going to give up I knew then that I had nothing else to worry about. My professionalism came out and I was spurred on by the fact that I was appalled that a teacher would elect to perform in such a shoddy way. I had not expected teachers would shirk their duties by not completing the assigned task. As I reflect upon this situation I would like to work out some strategies to help our teachers be able to have a more successful experience in a project of this nature. The important thing that came out of this situation was that my own passions and convictions were deepened. I will always do my best to incorporate cultural, artistic and life long lessons into everything that I teach and be a willing participant that will strive to complete the task at hand and devise strategies to overcome obstacles.
In spite of all the setbacks, lack of participation and low motivation I feel that the project was a success. I gained some problem solving skills, demonstrated professionalism, and enjoyed doing artwork alongside the students. Confidence in my abilities to reach some students that had not been successful before grew. By sitting down and working alongside and together with my students I was a positive role model. Showing perseverance, caring, cooperation and several other character traits my students saw in me the desire to live the character traits, not just mouth them. Students learned who I am and that I care. They became willing to share of themselves; we became closer as individuals and formed true bonds that will last forever.

The culture of my classroom has changed for the betterment of the students. Students will be given more of an opportunity to share of themselves. They will know that I am vitally interested in them as students, individuals and artists. Making it apparent that it is possible to find ones cultural identity through art and meld it into daily life will be one of my goals. Most importantly I will do a better job of creating lessons that help fulfill the need to look inside oneself, make discoveries and communicate to others. I realize the importance of writing
down the reflections of how the students view a project and will incorporate this into all my lessons from now on. I realize what a powerful tool this is for both the student as well as the teacher.

The absolute most amazing discovery about this project is; now I am almost finished writing this paper I can see that the original intent of this project was almost met. Albeit it was in a different, round about and surprising way than was planned to begin with. There are still many things to accomplish such as, define the goals for the future, work on a philosophy, and dedicate the center. A project of this kind is never really finished anyway.
Walking into our school and seeing the changes I helped create gives me a surge of pride and accomplishment. Our school is a better place because of the shield project and “Parent Corner”. One of my long term goals has finally been accomplished. Art, culture, and hospitality are evident in the school. The words of Anna M. Shaw sum up how I feel about the work I do. “The kind of trail you make will determine success or failure. It is not what you say that counts the most, but it is what you do.”⁴ No matter what, just do the work!
List of Related Projects

Placing furniture

Making wood burned shelf with native motif

Middle School logo

Continual display of multi-cultural art

Benefit dinner and auction

Community picnic

Community spaghetti dinner

Muffins for Mom

Doughnuts for Dad

Grandparents Day

Wall of Fame

Advisory breakfast for parents

Shields
Notes


Bibliography


