



Classic Newsletter Features

- Mentoring With Artifacts
- Using Artifacts: An Excellent Example
- Research Corner

Important Dates

Oct 21, 2008:
STEP=UP Field
Advisory Meeting
4:00 pm

Nov 18, 2008:
STEP=UP Field
Advisory Meeting
4:00 pm

STEP=UP Co-Directors

Michelle Parker-Katz
Marie Tejero Hughes

STEP=UP Staff

Anita Balasubramanian
Theresa Chapello
Thalia Kirchner
Aphrodite Spanos

STEP=UP Website
[http://www.uic.edu/orgs/
stepup/](http://www.uic.edu/orgs/stepup/)

Mentoring With Artifacts

We've had requests to re-examine some work we have gathered through the years of STEP=UP. In the upcoming newsletters, we reproduce and update some classic articles in our newsletters. This time we examine teachers' work with student artifacts.

Two themes emerged during the beginning stages of the 2005-06 STEP=UP school year: clarifying the role of the partner and using artifacts from the classroom to ground interactions. The link between the two is evident. Discussing artifacts can become a powerful tool to initiate interaction of ideas between UIC students and CPS partners. An understanding of the role of the partner as the escort through the travels of the classroom can kindle the professional exchanges around classroom artifacts.

We aim that the artifacts will provide a vehicle for teachers to figure out what colleagues might see and/or need as they move into becoming a special education teacher. We are reminded in research about the importance of varied kinds of support especially for persons new to the field.

In a survey of over 200 beginning special educators, Whitaker (2000) found that mentors were most effective in helping retain teachers if they "provided emotional support and met the 'personal adjustment' needs of

the beginning teacher." At UIC, those 'personal adjustment' needs vary a lot. Some UIC students are already teaching in general education or even special education settings. Some have been teaching for up to 10 years, while other students are at the beginning, mid-point, or end of a traditional program culminating in student teaching.

The hard part of mentoring a UIC student is figuring out what abilities as well as needs they might have. We are also struck by how Whitaker's findings fit with recent discussions among UIC students in which they talk about mentors as 'liaison' and 'connectors' to real teaching experiences.

They tell us that they are not looking for "the expert teacher who gives advice to others," but rather are searching for a guide, someone who will not only expose them to new ideas, but also listen to their questions and provide feedback. They do not want "the answer", they tell us, but instead want a good discussion about the uncertainties of teaching and how other teachers (including their peers) reason through situations.

Dave Rench, a CPS partner and mentor to interns and student teachers, put this idea in practice when he approached his UIC students with the following quandary: "I have been taking

students (with disabilities) into an inclusion class for the past four years. The majority of the students are familiar with my students and autism in general, but I still would like to educate all the students about our differences and how we all have weaknesses and strengths." So he posed the dilemma to UIC students: What are some of your ideas on a way for doing this with my students and the other typical learners?

Dave's method of drawing his UIC students into discussion of a genuine conundrum is the beginning step of a true collaboration between CPS partners and UIC students. In our thinking, that is a kind of "teamwork approach toward problem-solving." It is a valuable asset for all teachers, and particularly for special education teachers who will work collaboratively with other professionals. As partners, the opportunity presents itself with each UIC student to model true partnership in teaching.

Amos (2005, p. 18) sums up notions of an effective mentor by writing: "A beneficial mentoring relationship for beginning special educators has been correlated with retention of these teachers in the field of special education. This, in turn, positively affects the learning of the (K - 12) students who do not have to adjust annually to new, inexperienced teachers."

Amos, B.A. (2005). Defining the mentoring relationship of beginning special education teachers. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 71(4). 14-19.

Whitaker, S.D. (2000). Mentoring beginning special education teachers and the relationship to attrition. *Exceptional Children*, 66(4). 546-566.

Research Corner

Using Resources to Discover Literacy Artifacts Outside the Classroom, Walker, C.A., & Allen, D. (1997). *Should we travel by plane, car, train or bus? Teacher/child collaboration in developing a thematic literacy center. Reading Teacher*, 50, 524-527.

We all know the importance of blending in-school and out-of-school activities, as well as finding major themes or "big ideas" to use as hooks to help K-12 students connect reading and writing. Walker and Allen (1997) draw on good practice and research to suggest some major strategies, and those notions are also fundamental to the UIC students' learning. For example, they suggest that "children have opportunities to increase their understanding of the forms and functions of literacy by participating in thematic reading and writing activities in dramatic play contexts. This type of thematic play provides opportunities for children to use multiple forms of literacy in a variety of ways. Teachers are sometimes encouraged to guide the development and implementation of these types of thematic centers by initiating and developing themes, by selecting literacy materials, and by modeling literacy behaviors during play."

Walker and Allen describe their collaboration with preschool children in a play center that mimics a travel center. "We wanted the children to have a say in the topic for the center. We were also interested in including more reading and writing opportunities for the children." From the theory of multiple intelligences and notion that students learn through varied modifications, such a travel center (or any kind of dramatic reenactment) could provide chances for students with talents in art, graphics, keen spatial awareness for using maps, and so on to contribute their abilities to a group project and product.

Using Artifacts: An Excellent Example

This sample of one special educator's use of classroom artifacts emerged from a unit she does in her resource room.

Rose Sharon is a very experienced special educator teaching in a southeast CPS and working with intermediate elementary school students. At one meeting with UIC students, she brought in several items from a literacy unit that used literature and students' art work Sharon's 5th and 6th grade students work with her in a resource room. By interweaving two pieces of young adolescent literature that depicts two diverse family cultures, Ms. Sharon guided her students in her class to depict their own family lives and cultures through decorating a quilt square that is then linked with those of other students.

From their work, Sharon shared a number of artifacts that helped UIC students picture the instruction. She brought in two books she used with students, a book related to quilts and quilt-making, examples of students' quilt squares (made with different media on a large piece of construction paper) and an actual quilt. She used the items to detail how she had planned and implemented the unit.

Ms. Sharon began by talking about how she had used a family quilt to get students interested. She told UIC students about some of the questions she had used to involve the class in a discussion. She also shared examples of the types of comments students made. Along with the quilt, Ms. Sharon also shared a book. She read excerpts from the book, as she had done with her class, and modeled strategies she had used. She asked UIC students to think about the different ways the book could have been used with the lesson.

Finally, Ms. Sharon used the students' work samples to start a discussion on what students had been able to do and what she had done to support their success. She involved UIC students in talk about her students' thoughts, understandings, and experiences with this type of lesson and other literacy activities. In a short period of time, she managed to get her UIC partners involved in several discussions. She talked about her artifacts in such a way that they were engaged in conversation and encouraged to ask questions. This is one excellent example of how to use artifacts to begin conversations about teaching, students' learning, and assessment.

Illinois Council For Exceptional Children

Fall 2008 Convention, Nov 7-8, Itasca, Illinois

More Details at <http://www.illinoiscec.org/>