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Summer Institute 2010: Reflections by a Digital Native

Submitted by akio on Tue, 07/06/2010 - 3:59pm

I hate to gloat, but quite frankly, this year's Summer Institute entitled "A Sense of Place: Preserving, Working, and Celebrating our Land" was by far the best workshop yet.

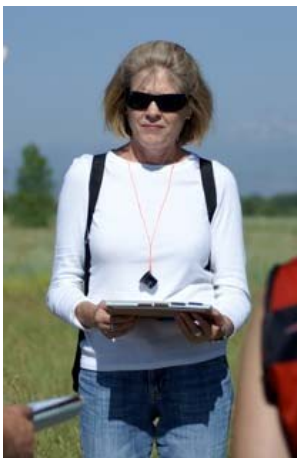
I'm not saying this because this would be the last summer institute in which I would participate. No, it really was the best. For me, it was not only about connecting with teachers, but also it was about learning more about myself and my relationship to the environment in which I live and interact.

I really enjoyed the initial "Getting Acquainted" group discussion regarding our sense of place with the "orange group." I'm usually the videographer, and I never get a chance to talk to any of the participants during the Summer Institute. Fortunately, this year, I was able to connect to some of the most intriguing teachers.

Anyway, I thought it was interesting that many in the orange group associated family with their sense of place...and for varying reasons. I definitely felt out of place when I suggested that my 'place' was in front of the computer. Thank you orange group for tolerating me. You were all wonderful.



I've always liked Mary Ann's presentations because 1) she is undeniably an awesome person, and 2) she always has these cool activities that really help me think about a particular issue at a deeper level. This time was no exception.



My favorite activity was "This is What I Think" where the participants positioned themselves on a line based on their degree of agreement or disagreement. The statement that seemed the most controversial was: "Expert archaeologists should be allowed to take the artifacts they excavate back to their home countries as long as they will be well cared for in a museum." This was premised by a statement about a Swedish nobleman who meticulously excavated and documented and tried to take home 600 artifacts from the Mesa Verde area. Most everyone disagreed with the statement. A striking majority of the teachers stated that the Swedish nobleman should not be able to take the artifacts to Sweden. I found this fascinating.

But what about all the mummies from the Egyptian exhibit at the Museum of Nature and Science? I remember Erin asking.

Someone brought up the idea of traveling exhibits.

Okay, but aren't there times when countries aren't the best preservationists? I thought.

What about countries where the government is not necessarily looking out for the welfare of a particular group of people and their culture?

Or what about countries at war?

What about...

Oh my gosh!

(I had my initial Ah-Ha moment right there on the first day.)

So that's what all this inquiry business is all about!

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I also found myself seeing the bigger picture with the "The Order of it All" activity. I thought this was a fantastic way to better understand how primary sources related to history. With the timeline, I could see how more artifacts led to various policies or historical events, or how writings were more prevalent in certain years.



Being a non-science person, and very introverted, I must admit, I was extremely nervous about Day 2. Fortunately, Poudre Learning Center ended up being one of my favorite experiences during the Summer institute.



The most memorable part of the excursion was when Ray told us not to spend a lot of time trying to memorize plant and animal names, but to remember the experience of finding them (the location, other observations, etc). At that point, I thought, *Okay, this is do-able for a non-science person like me.*

So I started taking some pictures...





...including pictures of people...







...and now I know what
Poison Ivy looks like...
(Now I know how to be
careful)...



The biggest Ah-Ha! moment for me was, without a doubt, making the connection between the Case Study from Day 1 to the [Von Trotha-Firestien Farm](#) at Bracewell.



In the four years I've lived in Northern Colorado, I've passed by that street on a number of occasions, and I must admit, I have cursed under my breath why I had to detour to another road. But, having gone through the farm and having heard about the history of the people who continue to preserve the area, I feel like I've taken for granted convenience over preservation, ethics, and quite frankly, common sense.



On Day 3, Anne Hatch's presentations reminded me that primary sources come in different products. We often use photos, letters, and other static visuals, but Anne's diverse mixture of multimedia helped me think not only about preserving for the future but also the need to consider the best medium by which we should preserve these artifacts. I especially enjoyed the Cowboy Poetry audio tracks (*Isn't it wild?* I remember hearing someone say).



And how can I not forget Jay Trask, the archivist at the Michener Library. When I heard him talk about the rigorous process of archiving, I suddenly realized that we take for granted many of these artifacts that are available for us. I definitely checked out the [Digital UNC site](#) to see what UNC primary sources were available.



I'm sure everyone noticed by Day 3, but I am very much convinced that Peggy Ford-Waldo from Greeley Museums is a human encyclopedia. I am serious. I think she knows everything about just about everything!



I was particularly curious about this guy:



As I think about the Summer Institute, I'm beginning to think that the biggest role of teachers like Mary Ann, Annie, Peggy, Ray, Mike, The Firestiens, Jay, and all of the teachers that come to our workshops, is to provide inspiration. One of my professors told me once that teachers are like puppeteers. I'd like to think of them as magicians.



Thanks everyone for a fantastic Summer Institute!

Akio Yamanaka

oh, and PS:

We couldn't have done it without these two special people:



Thank you Jessica and Haley. You guys totally rock!

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