Emerging out of the ashes: Place and place-based education

Diane Marie Zetlmaier

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EMERGING OUT OF THE ASHES: PLACE
AND PLACE-BASED EDUCATION

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
Education:
Interdisciplinary Studies

by
Diane Marie Zetlmaier
March 2008
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Approved by:

Dr. Samuel Crowell, First Reader

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ABSTRACT

The "Old Fire", a forest fire that consumed hundreds of square miles in our mountain community, was the seed from which my project "heArts for the Forest" grew. Through the heuristic inquiry method I have explored my own story, coping, growing and learning from a traumatic experience. My goal has been to learn and teach ways of enhancing our abilities to understand our "place" in life and how we affect the world around us.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge my dear friend and colleague Nancy Manning to whom this project would never of taken place. With her love, support and collaboration I was able to continue my journey.
DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this project/thesis, "Emerging from the Ashes" to my wonderful sister, Cheryl Moxley. Her love and never ending encouragement helped me to emerge, sprout, spread my seeds and nurture new life.
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Every man, every woman, carries in their heart and mind the image of the ideal place, the right place, the one true home, known or unknown, actual or visionary" (Abbey, 1968 p. 1). My home, my place, it has profoundly provided what I have learned about all the things I care about. They are the pages on which my life’s lessons have been written.

The seed from which my project grew was a devastating firestorm propelled along by Santa Ana wind gusts of over 50 miles per hour. This consuming inferno, which affected thousands in our area, instilled in all of us a sense of our fragility as human beings. Our loss gave us a need to bind together and protect our sense of place and reaffirm our hopes and dreams as a community.

Our place or community is more than simply a name of a location. It is the people who live there; it is the land, the plants and animals, the water, the air, and the soil. As Hay (1992) and others have argued, bonds to “place” facilitate meaningful relationships which then make the place itself more meaningful. Being an insider in a community, gives a person a strong center from which to
face the unknowns of the larger world. Good places are seen to also include space for growth and creative self-development.

In response to the aftermath of the Old Fire, I developed a project for our school called "heArts for the Forest". It explored the healing/growing process that must be done to comprehend the depth of our influence on our environment. I implemented this project through art, writing, investigating our local habitat, and involvement with our community. As a teacher, my goals in this project were to increase children’s knowledge of natural and human history in their community and also to develop an appreciation for their surroundings. My hope was that this knowledge and appreciation would lead to a connection and a sense of place.

My dream and goal found expression in the words of Jack Chin (2001) who wanted his students to;

become environmental stewards who can identify and relate to environmental problems that are real and proximate, not abstract and remote. They could more easily see, in a community context, that issues are interrelated, not separate and that perspectives on these issues are complex, not simply right or wrong (p. 19)
This philosophical ideal is embedded in a sense of place. Developing a sense of place perpetuates one’s ability to become more aware of themselves.

Teaching can have profound effects on the teacher as well as the student. This was particularly true with the heArts for the Forest project. I noticed that my own perception of teaching began to change and ultimately I was different because of it. This project is an exploration into this transformation.

Through heuristic inquiry I will explore how this place-based project has affected my life as a teacher and a person. I am aware that this effect cannot be measured in a day, week or year. The task here is to explore how, or in what ways, teaching can change the teacher. Because the heArts for the Forest project was so connected to my life and to our community, its impact on me was enormous. Thus, it is possible to chart this impact through the qualitative methodology of heuristic inquiry.

Self-inquiry, through artifacts, journals, peer-interviews, etc. not only adds to an understanding of change, but also opens us to the validity of self-investigation and self-transformation. This project is an example of this kind of inquiry.
In Chapter 2, the three questions addressed are as follows: 1. What is Place? 2. What is Place-Based Education? and 3. What are the benefits of Place-Based Education? From my experience in order to make learning more meaningful, one has to connect to their daily lives and their home. I will explore exactly what that means to me personally and as an educator. It was also important for me to explore and understand the research on Place-based Education, a relatively new field approach to education. To add to my own body of knowledge for my growth as an effective educator I will examine the benefits of this field. Through increasing my knowledge I’ll be able to add depth to the relevance of place for myself and my students.

In Chapter 3, I will present the questions relevant to discovering what community and place are and how they relate to me as a person and a teacher. I will also discuss the methodology and efficacy of heuristic inquiry. On a very personal level, I will explain how I designed and carried out the process of self inquiry.

Chapter 4 draws from journal writing, interviews, student surveys and artifacts from students’ artwork. Analyzing these data provides a basis for investigating teacher transformation. Though the data is subjectivity
oriented, it offers wisdom for teachers to learn and grow from their own experiences.

In Chapter 5, I will summarize my journey, synthesizing heuristically the depth and growth of my experience. I will explore implications for future projects and curriculum that reinforce meaningful learning and teaching.
CHAPTER TWO
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A Sense of Place and Place-Based Education

The purpose of the heArt for the Forest project was to help students develop an appreciation for the place they hold in their community. A goal of the project was to heighten students’ awareness and sense of responsibility in regard to their place in the local world, as well as in the global environment. In this chapter, the three questions addressed are as follows: 1) What is Place? 2) What is Place-Based Education?, and 3) What are the benefits of Place-Based Education?

What is “Place”?

As an educator, I have been fortunate enough to teach in my home community and environment. This opportunity has awarded me a rich basis for connecting with the “things” I care about. One argument is taken from a quote by E. Casey (n.d.) cited in Gruenwald (2003) stating that,

Place is as requisite as the air we breathe, the ground on which we stand, the bodies we have. We are surrounded by places. We walk over and through them. We live in places, relate to others in them, and die in them. Nothing we do is unplaced. How could it be
otherwise? How could we fail to recognize this primal fact? (p. 622)

Place is a theme that Hill and McCormick (1989) cited in Singleton (1993) have described as “deceptively simple.” They go on to explain, “All places on the earth have distinctive tangible and intangible characteristics that give them meaning and character and distinguish them from other places” (p. 8).

According to Sobel (1993), lessons provided by the teacher guide students into the process of connecting their place in the scheme of things through exploring and discovering their own space. The concept of a special place for children allows for their imagination to formulate their connectivity to nature. Sobel described the process for “developing a sense of place depends on the previous bonding of the child to the nearby natural world in middle childhood. The sense of place is born in children’s special places” (p. 161). A fort, tree house, or special corner of the yard allows them to build imagination and explore their identities. Through their exploration, be it independent or guided, they learn to formulate their own diverse perspectives and see that their ever widening view of the world is truly an aspect of their own lives. To learn with feeling, empathy and the
desire to explore leads to experiences that are valuable because they are directly applicable to the real world and the creativity that can be gleaned and utilized in a realistic, intrinsic application to their lives. The real world gives more meaning to students learning and makes what they learn become part of them.

In addition to characteristics of place, Hill and McCormick (1989) cited in Singleton (1993) argue that there are key ideas that relate to the theme of place as follows: First of all they propose that, “Places have physical characteristics. These characteristics, which are products of natural processes, include such things as landforms, bodies of water, natural resources, natural plant and animal life, and climate” (p. 8). For example, during science lessons students have the opportunity to go out and explore the outdoor environment and observe each aspect of it through observation and using all of their senses. Secondly they believe, “places have human characteristics. These characteristics include the aspects of the environment created by humans, such as buildings, roads, pollution, and so on” (p. 8). Many believe that humans are in charge of their destinies, if that is the case then one would conclude that if we don’t take care of our earth, we are destined to reap what we sow. Last of
all, they suggest, “places may be described or represented in different ways” (p. 8). In essence, many of us love our environment, but we all have a different world view. Furthermore, they suggest that “This apparently simple statement embodies the idea that people invest places with meanings, the human intellectual and emotional responses to the place” (p. 8). Regardless of an individual’s situation they have a place within their perspective of the world that is special to them and can help them learn.

Nabhan and Trimble (1994) noted “We learn of our homeland from stories, just as we learn nearly everything from stories” (p. 20). Through storytelling, many cultures have learned about their place in the world and have learned right behaviors. Peter Aleshire (2005), editor of Arizona Highways magazine, told in his editorial about the Apache Indians and their connection to their place. “The Apaches say that wisdom sits in places and so a person must sit quietly in those places to let that wisdom seep in” (p. 3).

According to Kessler (2000) the connection to nature or place is,

The beauty and majesty of nature that calls forth awe or wonder that satisfies the spirit. For others, it is the power and mystery, which defies human control
and puts everyday problems or disappointments into perspective, the rhythms of nature, the eternal cycles of the day and the seasons, give some students a sense of participation in a larger frame of meaning (p. 29).

It can be observed in any classroom setting how students that struggle in the confines of the classroom find true expression of their inner talents in a natural setting. Joseph Cornell (1979) states “I have never underestimated the value of such moments of touching and entering into nature. I have seen through my own experience and that of many others, that we can nourish that deeper awareness until it becomes a true and vital understanding of our place in this world” (p. 8).

Gruenewald (2003) suggests, “The study of nature will provide students with direct contact to the natural world outside their classroom’s, lead them to learn and care about their local places and nurture a sense of wonder, appreciation and connection to non-human life” (p. 638). The fourth grade students at Lake Gregory Elementary School read the story A River Ran Wild by Lynne Cherry. After reading they made a quilt demonstrating how the river changed through time. The quilt was in a design of a river flowing from pristine clear water to factory
pollution, to finally, back to its pristine state with the help of the community. The students developed a connection to their local landscape and watershed finding ways they could help protect our community. Scott (2002) gives several definitions for the sense of place stating, "A sense of place is a sense of history, of human and non-human interaction, and the vital connection between where we live and who we are" (p. 5). The watershed quilt activity helped the students develop a connection with their neighborhood watershed and ways that each of them as individuals could make an impact on their place.

The American Forest Foundation (AFF) (2006) firmly believes that "feeling connected fosters a sense of caring for place, which promotes stewardship and the stronger the sense of place, the more an individual will care about and for their surroundings and communities" (p. 26). Learning must be personally meaningful and useful for students to relate to it, develop ownership and even care about it.

Thomashow (1995) posed four main questions to explore how individuals achieve "ecological identity". His questions were as follows:

What do I know about the place where I live? Where do things come from? How do I connect to the earth? What is my purpose as a human being" (p. XVII)? These
questions can be used to guide experiences that help children explain their relationship with the Earth.

The questions focus curriculum and instruction on understanding and appreciating students’ immediate surroundings. What could be more personal than your own personal place? It is the fertile soil from which new understandings grow.

What is Place-Based Education?

As an educator the concept of “placed-based” education has the potential to catch one’s attention and the enthusiasm it produces made it a wonderful vehicle for this project. Historically there have been many expert educators who have written books on the subject and several of them will be reviewed in this chapter. The idea of caring for the earth and being aware of our surroundings is an age-old concept and has had a great resurgence in the last few decades which can be reflected in society and culture.

John Dewey (1915) believed that “experience [outside the school] has its geographical aspect, its artistic and its literary, its scientific and its historical sides. All studies arise from aspects of the one earth and the one life lived upon it” (p. 91). Dewey provided a basis for
outdoor educational methods that are conventional and designed to help students make the necessary connections with their own particular geographic area. For example, at Lake Gregory Elementary School, the teachers are able to utilize Lake Gregory as a field study on migrating birds. The community lake is the site of a diverse population of wildlife during the migratory seasons. Students can conduct a bird count for the Cornell University in February and keep records of all the different species of duck, geese, and other birds that migrate to the lake each year. The students then create a model and report on the bird of their choice. They also study fish, frog and the turtle populations in this aquatic community. The students form a personal connection to Lake Gregory and the experience is personally meaningful.

Schroder (2006) believes that, “Thinking about the concept of ‘place’ in relationship to education leads to exceptionally rich and creative avenues of exploration, especially when coupled with a social justice perspective” (p. 312). Social justice in the classroom includes the concept of democracy and shared decision making. To be held responsible for our decisions, to be able to adjust and reevaluate our choices is vital to our learning to protect our environment. We become more conscious of our
efforts and the effects they have on our stewardship of place. Gruenewald (2003) comments that,

In action research projects teachers guide students in carrying out practical investigations in areas that the students themselves have identified as important. Properly conducted, action research empowers students to think critically and creatively. When taking on issues related to their larger communities, students will learn first hand the political and sociological realities within which their schools are embedded, they will also necessarily come into direct contact and form alliances with social institutions and community actors outside school. (p. 640)

For example, our students in "heArts for the Forest" gained the support of many organizations and community helpers. This effort gave students an opportunity to take ownership, become connected to their community and make their school proud by making a difference in the school. This helped them develop a sense of place in the school community by being ambassadors for a meaningful cause.

Place is not just a just a physical location, it is the people who make up the community of a place. As Kessler (2000) believes, "A meaningful connection includes
respect and care that encourages authenticity for each individual in the group” (p. 22). An effective place-based education meets the needs of all learners by connecting them to their physical and social environment.

Knapp (2005) argues, “When nature and culture are viewed as interconnected circles or cycles, and their makeup and structure are carefully considered, new discoveries often result” (p. 283). For example, the fall of 2005 brought to “heArts” new opportunities. Crestline Communities Development Alliance/Mountain Beautiful invited us to join the Regional Park at Lake Gregory to participate in a tree-planting day. In attendance were grandparents, aunts, uncles, parents and kids of all ages wielding shovels, pushing wheelbarrows full of manure, and moving rocks to prepare a site for 20 new trees. This experience helped our school and community establish a personal and caring relationship with our forest. Knapp (2005) suggests that “action projects can be physically, intellectually, and emotionally satisfying and help the land and local community” (p. 283).

An individual’s perspective changes when an understanding of place-based education takes root. They begin to see how what they learn is really part of a larger picture. They are able to fit their new learning
into a meaningful, useful aspect that can be used to help them become members of a society of individuals whose goals are civic participation and active stewardship of the environment.

Woodhouse and Knapp (2000) reviewed existing literature on place-based education and found that it "reveals characteristic patterns to this still-evolving approach that makes it distinctive" (p. 2). These were their most relevant points:

1. It is specific to a particular place.
2. It is multidisciplinary.
3. It is experiential to nature.
4. It has sustainability.
5. It has connections through self, nature and community.

An example of how this works in the classroom can be seen in a simple Black History unit. In February, teachers at Lake Gregory celebrate Black History Month by reading stories about the Underground Railroad. We discuss the "freedoms" that we have and how difficult it was for the slaves in the South to earn their freedom from being enslaved. In our classroom we celebrate Black History and our freedoms by creating a community quilt of our own demonstrating our feelings of freedom and pride for our
own community. We display our quilt in our school and around our community. The students develop a sense of connectedness and pride of ownership to their place. The children understand that the slave's connection to their physical and social environment meant their survival. Our children also understand that their social and physical environment sustains and supports their well-being and survival.

The Benefits of Place-Based Education and Curriculum

The benefits of Place-based education are many. Helping children develop a personal relationship with their local environment is paramount. Through the project "heArts for the Forest," and Lake Gregory Elementary we have utilized the lake environment as a microcosm of the mountain area by exploring the possibilities of problem solving, communicating with the community and enlarging our interpersonal skills. The appreciation of the natural area has grown exponentially disseminating and analyzing our experiences. Lake Gregory Elementary has internalized the ownership of the area and are empowered by our efforts and our successes. Curriculum geared toward exploring places can deepen empathetic connections and expand the possibilities for learning outward. Sobel (1996) explains,
"Place based curriculum can mirror the expanding scope of the child’s significant world, focusing first on the home and school, then the neighborhoods, the community, the region, and beyond" (p. 19). The children who have experienced the project have a significantly enriched foundation for their knowledge of their neighborhood, community and the larger world perspective.

Chin (2001) speaks of 3 critical aspects of an effective place-based education program which are: Content, Quality, and Connectivity.

Through the Content students become more engaged because the curriculum is more relevant and not generic. The Quality of teaching and learning improves because teachers, students and the community members care more. The Connectivity benefits students because they apply what they learned in school to improve the community and local environment. It helps teachers collaborate with each other and with members of the community, and the community replenishes its social capital through intergenerational interactions. Educational achievements, youth development, community revitalization and environmental stewardship all start with the development of a sense of place, a sense of
belonging. Complementary approaches such as community schooling and place-based education offer ways to re-connect us all with each other, our communities and the natural world so that everything fits together (p. 26).

According to Schroder (2006), “Place-conscious education is compatible with many current education efforts, including community-based approaches, constructivist and problem-based approaches, indigenous education and service learning” (p. 314). The concept of service learning creates a humanist aspect and benefit for students. The benefit to the local community and the greater global community grow with practice and maturity. As the children are introduced to service learning, they grow in their knowledge and understanding of the effects of their actions. They also share with others the satisfaction gleaned from their efforts.

Sobel (2004) believes that through place-based education the students are able to make clear connections with their community and their own environment. Hands-on opportunities help them see and understand their integrated relationship with their own neighborhood and they are more able to find meaning in their learning.
Students are more eager and learn better when they care about the subject.

Place based Education is easily incorporated in the multiple core curricular subjects of science, social studies, language arts and the fine arts. The community becomes the classroom and the student discovers as Sobel (2004) suggests that “Their learning is relevant to their world” (pg. 7). Educators at Lake Gregory have found that expanding place-based education into our core curricular areas is not only feasible, but also enriching for our children and our community.

Lieberman and Hoody (1998) cited in Louv (2005) support Place-based Education by stating in their Roundtable’s report that “environment-based education produces student gains in social studies, science, language arts, and math; improves standardized test scores and grade point averages; and develops skills in problem solving, critical thinking, and decision making” (p. 204).

Summary

Through the concept and implementation of place-based education we teach the children to live and learn in harmony with others and importantly to become stewards of the earth. In the words of Walt Whitman (n.d.) cited in
Louv (2005) "There was a child went forth every day, And
the first object he looked upon, That object he became,
And that object became part of him for the day or a
certain part of the day, Or for many years..."(introduction,
n.p.). We teach that as the world becomes smaller through
ever changing communication devices and technology that
our own space, and knowledge of caring for it, helps us
apply our perspectives to the larger picture. We learn the
universality of experience. Place based education teaches
us to adapt and constantly strive to maintain a world
perspective of harmony and getting along with our fellow
human beings.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

An individual's perspective changes when an understanding of place-based education takes root. Students begin to see how what they learn is really part of a larger picture. They are able to fit their new learning into a meaningful, useful perspective that can help them become the kinds of individuals whose goals are civic participation and active stewardship of the environment.

For this study I have chosen a heuristic approach. Heuristic inquiry leads one into a deeply reflective process. It provides both a synthesis of experiences, as well as a way to analyze the aspects of experiences that are most significant.

Moustakas (1985) argues that "the focus in a heuristic quest is on re-creation of the lived experience; full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person. The challenge is fulfilled through examples, narrative descriptions, dialogues, stories poems, artwork, journals and diaries, autobiographical logs, and other personal documents" (Cited in Heuristic Research, p. 35).
Sobel (2004) believes that through place-based education the students are able to make clear connections with their community and are more able to find meaning in their learning. Students are more eager and learn better when they care about the subject. "As students and teachers we need to emphasize hands-on, real-world learning experiences (p. 7). By reflecting on the heArts for the Forest project, I will explore how these connections to place and community are fostered and nurtured.

In the process of analyzing this heuristic study I will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How do real-world learning experiences make a difference for students and teachers?

2. Is heuristic inquiry, using your own internal frame of reference, a valuable approach to developing curriculum?

3. Why is it critical to help students to develop a sense of place and a responsibility to our environment?

4. Is it an important part of the educational process to guide students into a meaningful relationship with our local and global community?
5. Can collaborative teaching enrich the teaching and learning process?

6. Will my view of teaching be transformed by conducting this heuristic study and how will it affect the core of my professional identity?

This is how I will collect data in order to synthesize the most personal and meaningful aspects of this project. I will describe in the first person a synthesis of personal data represented by 1) my personal story/journal writing perspectives, 2) reflections from the Old Fire and heArts for the Forest project, and 3) reflections from collaborative teaching. Then I will analyze aspects from these experiences that represent a way my identity as a teacher was transformed.

Building on these ideas of heuristic inquiry, I will analyze artifacts, personal journals, peer interviews, and reflective processes to explore the nature of transformation within myself. This can be described as a process of radical subjectivity in which the teacher is both subject and object.
CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS

Place-Based Education

To live in a community, you need to become familiar with or be a part of that community. It's about joining heads, hands, hearts, and the places in which we dwell with competent affection.

Sobel (2004) argues that, as students and teachers we need to emphasize hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhance students' appreciation for the natural world, and create a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of a school (p. 7).

A Heuristic Inquiry into heArts in the Forest

The method of heuristic inquiry leads one into a deeply reflective process. It provides both a synthesis of experiences as well as a way to analyze the aspects of
experiences that are most significant. This chapter will describe in the first person a synthesis of personal data represented by 1) my personal story/journal writing perspectives, 2) reflections from the Old Fire and heArts for the Forest project, and 3) reflections from collaborative teaching. Then I will analyze aspects from these experiences that represent in a way my identity as a teacher was transformed.

My Personal Story

Growing up in a small community gave me a blanket of security and a sense of place. We were taught to give of ourselves generously and without expectation of reward. Friendships were solid and unconditional. My happiness was not shadowed by inadequacy or self-doubt, my world was small, warm and self-contained. My safe harbor of family and community helped me deal with any of my hardships (See Appendix A).

Life in the mountains can be described in so many rushes of light, sound, scent, warmth and cold. The physical responses were so natural and inherent; the mental delight in the response was indeterminate and flowing. We did not wake up in the morning and begin contemplating our life’s path. Instead, we knew without a
doubt that we had a secure and loving system which would sustain, support and guide us.

We awoke to the commotion of birdsong, child talk, hustle and chores. Helping each other was a commitment, innate, familial and understood the eldest helped the youngest. We laughed, argued, ate and competed for the bathrooms.

Playing outside in nature was almost a requirement since our mom needed the mental health seconds and peace and quiet that six noisy children in one house absorbed.

Family dinners were rich with chatter about our days, sharing stories and laughing a lot. I remember laughing so hard I blew milk out of my nose. That started everyone howling even louder. Those coming together at mealtime moments were so deeply appreciated that my own small family enjoys sitting down together, reflecting in small prayers of thanksgiving for the richness of our lives, and sharing our meals. Hopefully the sharing of our familial experience will be celebrated by our children’s, children’s, children. The warmth in my heart for the gifts I received as a child is a large part of the commitment I have to share with others.

The better percentage of my life to this point has been spent in the San Bernardino Mountains. Like my
parents before me, my husband and I have raised our children in the mountains. We have tried to instill the same appreciation of place, respect, and a sense of responsibility for the environment as our parents imparted to us.

As a teacher, becoming in touch with my inner-most feelings and personal sense of responsibility to nature, I try to help the children discover their own personal connection with the natural world. My philosophy is that our planet is just one big world community. This gives us an opportunity to think globally, but act locally. We may not be able to save the world, but we can make a difference in our own backyard. My goal is to help provide grounding for children, a sense of their place in their community and a sense of self. Joseph Cornell (1998) states, anytime I’ve done an observation project with kids I try to have them think about more than what they can see. What do you hear, what do you smell, are you tasting anything right now, what does the rock you are sitting on right now feel like? The more that they get into that mind frame, that they are observing, they look at things more closely to see where that smell is coming from and before you know it they are digging around flower parts. It is one thing to look at your lab book in science and it is
another to be out in nature and using the same source. You are looking at something so much more tangible, when you are using all of your senses. Being quiet is an integral part of that; silence is huge because the children we struggle with are the kids that can’t sit in their seats being quiet.

I use an exercise from the book *Sharing Nature With Children* by Joseph Cornell. We take a short walk down to the lake and I have the students sit quietly on the ground. I say to the group to close your eyes and just listen for just a minute, then tell what you heard. Many times they talk about human sounds, like a backpack rattling or feet shuffling. Then they talk about all the natural sounds in nature and we do it again. The students really seem to understand the second time (Cornell, 1998). It is like let’s wipe out what we know and think about what we don’t. It gives a level of detail that you don’t get by reading or even by doing scientific experiments in a lab.

Another facet of my goal is to encourage service to community, not only the community in which we live but also including our country and the larger community of mankind. I want to foster an ideal of ambassadorship, courtesy, compassion and communication. I want children to
see beyond their own small sphere and realize that there are millions of individuals in the world and that when we share ideals we can make our lives richer, fuller and the planetary environment better for all (See Appendix B).

I want to be able to incorporate the values of service and giving in my teaching. Children need to learn that being of service is not a "one time effort", that there won't always be gratitude to follow. As the ancient saying states, "giving is its own reward." It is the knowledge of giving that is rewarding, not the acknowledgement. (That doesn't mean that acknowledgement doesn't have its gratification, but it should never be expected.) The more you think of others, the more selfless you become.

Reflections: The Old Fire/heArts for the Forest

During the Old Fire the residents of our beautiful mountains were evacuated and displaced from their homes for 11 days. Watching the television was like mourning an old friend. Our mountain was in the midst of a towering inferno and there was nothing we could do about it. I felt totally vulnerable. In the movie called "Pecos Bill", he said "the land is defenseless." When this demon fire came down upon my friend, the mountain, it truly was
defenseless. Reflecting back on this time away we all were homeless and struggling and I needed to rise above the flames and do something to put out the aching feeling in my heart.

Being a teacher I feel I have to be brave and set a good example. I want to be a good ambassador. I want to be a shepherd and take care of all my lambs. This experience of being selfless helps me convert my problems, into opportunities to practice patience and to learn.

After the Old Fire my friend, soul mate and colleague Nancy Manning and I thought of an idea to help our students understand how precious our local mountain environment is. Many of us needed to start the healing process and stop being afraid to leave home in the mornings. We realized that many of our students needed a creative activity beyond the classroom to feel less like victims and more in control of their lives. Nancy and I came up with an idea of an after-school art and science program that would involve our students and community members. We hoped to raise money by selling our art creations to help buy trees to replant the forest. This seed of an idea needed the nurturing spirit of more than one person. Nancy has been my partner in teaching from the beginning, so it was just a natural fit. Working with
Nancy as my partner and trusted friend I have grown as a teacher and an individual. Two or more hearts and heads are better than one. You have someone to bounce energy and ideas off of. Working collaboratively gives you a courage and insight beyond just yourself; you each bring your unique talents and views to the mix. Whatever each of us thinks we are lacking the other one has the compassion to fill in. I have sprouted new wings because of Nancy. I am truly blessed. It has been a fantastic journey.

When the students first arrived in the afternoon, we would have a “coming together” snack. I would reflect on my childhood and remember how important it was to be together as a “family” at meal time. This time provided great conversation and connecting as we broke bread with each other. The snack was small but the rewards were great. We all discovered that no matter what disappointments life offers, we can overcome. We are together, and that is what really matters. The project not only helped heal students, it helped us all bind our wounded hearts as well. We became a “family” in our community and created a “place” for healing (See Appendix C).

Utilizing “heArts for the Forest” as a reference and basis for self-exploration we would daily write in our
journals delving ever deeper into our feelings and expressions of courage and our responses to our own self contained worlds. The children were encouraged to draw if that form of expression opened a door into an area of their feelings they could not find words for (See Appendix D). They were then encouraged to share their feelings by talking about and explaining the picture and I was able to help them express their artwork in writing. Helping to draw out their heartfelt and deep rooted reactions to their experience required that I learn and practice a deeper sense of patience and humility. The commonality of human spirit that binds us all became my guide for reaction and response. Throughout the implementation of this theme I found myself healing and growing stronger as an individual and as a mentor-teacher to the children whose lives I was taking some responsibility for.

The great healing power of sharing a common loss, of expressing thoughts, emotions and feelings through art and writing had a powerful and profound lesson for life. I found great and heartfelt gratitude in the depths of my soul for the experience of growth and sharing. I had discovered the rewards of giving and expanding my own recovery into the hearts and minds of others was gratifying beyond measure. I feel that the outreach into
the community was valuable and exponentially enriching for those touched by our experience and our desire to share our healing processes.

Personal and Professional Transformation

My story then has become one in which I strive for constant growth of my spirit and the recognition of the deep sense of worth in each individual child's core. My spirit and inner sense of well being are fed generously by the growth I see in the depth of perception the children develop.

I am heartened by the inquiry and sense of curiosity that is burgeoning in their imaginations. It is food for my soul to see their eagerness to learn and synthesize the information they have gleaned into new possibilities. My sense of responsibility to teach and nurture the love of nature and the sense of stewardship of the earth in children has grown immensely. Each and every day I give consideration to my own personal environment and also to how I can foster a love of the earth in the children whose lives I can personally touch. I feel in my heart that I have helped to create citizens of the planet, global thinkers with deep appreciation of the natural world and their place in it.
My teaching style has evolved into a new rewarding depth whose theme is to better the "place" in which we exist. As a pebble thrown into a pond causes ripples to flow outward, so my hope and dream is that my teaching and influence will be carried on through the children into the greater realm of thinking and action in the future. My dream is that the concept of stewardship is implanted and becomes deeply ingrained in the hearts of children and those they may grow to influence. It is my deepest and most profound hope that all people find the concept of stewardship of this beautiful planet earth to be of primary concern that they become deeply involved, committed and compelled to repair and maintain the abundance this earth provides.
CHAPTER FIVE
CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This project began as a task to explore how, or in what ways, teaching can change the teacher and the students. How can connecting real world experiences and making them meaningful enrich the lives of a community? I found that we actually learn so much more when we engage in hands-on experiences. In Chapter 2 I reviewed the existing concepts surrounding a sense of place and place-based education. These hands-on educational experiences have proven to give students and teachers a sense of responsibility for our planet. Chapter 3 discussed what questions I would delve into during my heuristic journey through the heArts for the Forest project. In my analysis I answered these questions and explored how I became transformed by my experiences.

My heuristic journey has given me a sense of responsibility to teach and nurture the love of nature and the sense of stewardship of the earth. Through the project I observed a heightened commitment to our local environment where as before it was missing. The enthusiasm overwhelmed me. A sense of place can be felt most
everywhere, and can, indeed, have far reaching, positive consequences.

My heuristic journey has a renewed youthfulness in me. It is young and growing in depth and given rise to an understanding. My dream is that as this journey matures, I will be able to reflect and enjoy a deep knowledge that my life had a positive impact in its own personal sphere and my influence on others.

As the journey progresses I will be able to infuse it with the enthusiasm and knowledge I have gleaned through this inquiry process. The learning will continue through travels with the focus of eco-geography, exploring other methods for mentoring the involvement in community and place. I plan to enlarge upon the projects which were begun as a part of this adventure, constantly improving through communication efforts to expand the consciousness of stewardship for our community and the earth. We will be planting a school garden, with community involvement, of native drought tolerant, fire resistant plants. This will not only teach, but encourage the planting of eco-friendly flora. The journey is never-ending, and inquiry is now a part of my life. This life has been made fuller by this experience. My goal is to work with other teachers, helping us all to be leaders and followers of the aspect
of one earth and one individual's path on it and the difference we can affect for the good of all.

These lessons of my life have helped mold my existence into one in which I have found comfort and the understanding that I am part of a whole. I am now more aware of my limits and my abilities. I know not to compare myself with others, because there will always be greater and lesser persons than myself. I have learned to enjoy my achievements as well as my plans.

My "place" in the larger picture is both tangible and intangible; I know what I do, yet the effects of my efforts are not entirely known. Throughout my life, my hopes and dreams will continue to involve a sense of connection to the earth and the way we live our lives become deeply valuable concerns. To teach "place", that is, to raise awareness beyond self to the greater sphere of citizenship of a planet, of living things and high ideals is in my heart attainable and worthy of my life's endeavors.

Recommendations for Teachers

I would recommend this heuristic approach, where we seeks out our own internal frame of reference and truth, to other educators as a fulfilling and rewarding approach
to teaching and living. Heuristic inquiry will lead teachers to a renewed commitment to teaching and a revitalized enthusiasm to share with their students. I learned that we as educators need to generate hope for the future and faith in our young people.

My sincere desire is that the current trend of education will give way to a time when real-world experiences infuse the curriculum in our schools with depth and creative problem solving opportunities. Teachers need to guide students towards a sense of responsibility and stewardship for their communities and our environment.

Like the pine cone that opens up and spreads its seeds after a fire, I have transformed into an enhanced person and teacher. My heuristic experience has brought new life to my teaching style. I am a stronger more confident individual than I was previously. I will continue this journey and learn from all my experiences.
APPENDIX A

PERSONAL HISTORY
Personal History

I am a lover of nature, a geologist, a cartographer, an astronomer, a nurse, a psychologist, a dreamer of peace, a mother, a wife, a daughter, a sister and a good friend, I am Dee Dee Zetlmaier and I teach.

The San Bernardino Mountains have been my home all of my life. I was born and raised in the beauty of the mountains and find reserves of strength from them that will endure as long as I live.

When I was younger, being in nature was a daily experience. I was never alone. I meandered through the forest, climbed trees, built forts, dabbled in the creek, watched birds soaring over the lake, observed spiders spinning their webs, and felt peace on earth. My sisters, brothers and I would spend hours outdoors and only came in to the house when my dad would whistle for us to come in for my mom’s home cooked meals. Life was grand!

The older I got the more pleasure I received from living in the mountains, it was a true gift. I would go camping, and lie in my sleeping bag watching the night sky; I learned how the parts of our universe are part of the whole and how it interacts with everything. I could go on hikes and just enjoy the beauty of the majestic forest; one feels so small yet powerful surrounded by our giant pines and mighty oaks. Our family could go forever in our “Beast”, an old Toyota Land Cruiser, and explore places of days gone by. We would swim in Deep Creek and spend the day just enjoying the quiet serenity. My simple little world was peaceful and to me was heaven on earth!

When I was in high school I worked at Santa’s Village as a “pixie”, clerk. It was so much fun play acting the part, and often my friend Kathy and I would go out into the forest and eat lunch. People would walk by and see some pixie’s eating and they thought we were just part of the scenery. I loved working there and all of its surroundings.

Growing up in the San Bernardino Mountains has given me a grounding of “place”. I feel threatened by anyone that wants to destroy my world. The mountain has gone through a cyclic history of forest fires, drought, and reforestation. In the time I have been here I have seen many forest fires and was evacuated twice.

In 1957 a plane crashed on the front side of our mountain. My father worked as an ambulance driver for the Santa Anita Hospital in Lake Arrowhead. I was six years old and I remember how frightened I was when we were evacuated to the hospital. We were lucky that the fire stayed on the Rim and did not come over the ridge into our valley of Arrowhead Woods. Through a child’s eyes it is a daunting experience.
My next encounter with evacuation happened during the OLD FIRE on October 25th, 2003. It was another beautiful fall day in the mountains. It was Saturday and there was a sweet breeze that ran through the trees. I just wanted to run and jump into a pile of freshly raked leaves.

We were experiencing a 5 year drought. The pine trees were weak from an infestation of the bark beetle. The drought and the beetles had killed many of our yellow pine trees in the forest. The forest had turned from beautiful green to festering brown in a period of 2 years. It was rather surreal, comparing this to a science fiction movie. Lake Arrowhead and Lake Gregory, (man-made lakes fed by underground springs and streams) were at an all time low. Little did we know the time was ripe for a senseless arsonist to set a match to our mountain community.

The difficult times, while being displaced from our homes, were that everything happened so quickly, when you are leaving you forget to bring important information. I had no phone numbers of loved one’s; I just had my cell phone. I thought I would only be gone for a day or two, which ended up being eleven. Not being able to get in touch with your very dear friends was unbearable.

I remember going to my Master’s class at Cal State San Bernardino, while we were evacuated. I hadn’t seen or heard from Nancy Manning, my heart and soul friend, and not knowing her whereabouts was unbearable. I had no cell phone number for her. It was a feeling of being defenseless, it was miserable. All of the sudden, I saw her walking far down the sidewalk and I remember dropping my books and running to meet her. When we saw each other, we just embraced, never wanting to let go and cried. It was a moment I will never forget. This experience taught me to be prepared and ready for any disaster at all times. It is very important to be organized.

At class that day we made bread and we were suppose to give a piece to someone we didn’t know. My husband and I were staying with friends in Lake Forest. I remember driving along and wondering who I could bless with my piece of bread. I drove up to the toll booth on toll road 143 and I gave it to the woman in the booth. I told her very quickly the story of how we blessed the bread in class and we were to give it to someone in need. I thought since she was alone in the booth and maybe needed some nourishment, I would give it to her. She was in shock and speechless. She did say thank you, and I thought after I drove off that she just might think I poisoned it or something, maybe she thought I was crazy. It was a good feeling though, here I was without a home and was able to give something away. I was blessed!

Another agonizing thing that happened during the evacuation was, not knowing if your house was going to be there when you got back. The news
reports on the television, which you are glued to, are many times reported with the wrong information. It is so frustrating to hear that they are reporting about the San Bernardino Mountains and they are showing pictures from another fire. The report is so important to the people that live in the area; it is a hopeless and defenseless feeling.

When we were able to go home, and I was so thankful to be getting home, my friend the mountain was undeservingly tortured. I had never seen anything like it. All one could see was the guardrail running up the road, the wood under it was burned out and blackened ground and stubs. Seeing Santa’s Village was haunting. I had so fond memories of my youth and the whole spirit of Christmas. Now driving past my old stomping grounds was devastating. Homes and trees on both sides of the road were completely burned down. Santa’s Village was spared, but many areas around it had been destroyed. My paradise had been tormented, I was grief-stricken.

The Old Fire, which lasted approximately 14 days, killed 6 people, destroyed 993 homes and 10 commercial buildings, destroyed 91,281 acres, and cost $42,045,093 to fight. One of our teacher’s houses was burned in Hook’s Creek and many of our student’s homes we destroyed. The Old Fire left our community stunned and shocked at the devastation of our beautiful home. We lived in a daze for weeks trying to grapple with our loss.

As a teacher I felt my need and that of my students was overwhelming to find some meaning and a way of healing our hearts and minds. My friend and colleague, Nancy Manning and I developed a school/community/place-based program called heArts for the Forest. It was an after-school art program that would eventually make sense of all our sadness.
APPENDIX B

PERSONAL JOURNAL
Journal

Traveling to school today I had the opportunity to observe a storm coming in. The clouds were just floating rapidly across the valley of Crestline and Lake Gregory. I wanted to stop and just slow down my morning some. I got to school and decided to take a few minutes and just admire the beauty that was unfolding in front of me. The clouds were drifting to the north at about 50 miles an hour. They were semi-transparent and with hues of red, gray and beige. It was so “cool” getting to watch, it made me more grateful to be present in that moment.

It snowed last night and the school district called a Snow Day. I really love these days to just sit back and reflect on life. Times like these help me slow down and appreciate what I have. I want to make a difference in my students lives by doing something positive and community minded. What could hold you back, the fear of the unknown or making a mistake? If I meet my fears I most likely will make some mistakes. Are mistakes bad or are they just stepping stones towards success. My Principal, Dave Bealer has the attitude that every problem is an opportunity. When you face life as an opportunity it doesn’t matter if you make mistakes. You just learn from them and go on. Fear has held me back in my early life. I would convince myself I couldn’t do it, keeping the brakes on and really staying in the same spot, and never taking chances. With the help of family, teachers, and friends I have been able to alter those doubtful feelings (most of the time) and think on the positive side, and go on. This positive thinking has transformed me from stomping on the brake pedal to anticipating the obstacles that are in front of me. Now I maneuver my future in a direction that I can achieve. Confidence is not something that you are born with (not a born trait); rather your character develops through trials or life experiences. You have to take risks, take the first step and just go for it. No one ever got anywhere telling themselves they couldn’t do it, they faced the bull in the eyes and went for it. Sure mistakes will happen, but all you have to do is learn from them, that is what builds character.

Fear has to be faced or it won’t go away. After the evacuation our whole community was fearful. We all had our stories, not one of them lesser than the other. Fear of the unknowing was there, if we would have leave our homes, schools, business or our livelihoods was always on the back of our minds. Our mountain had been scarred but living with the fear would not heal. Many community people stepped into help. That is the great thing about a community. No one person can do anything by themselves, but many hands working towards the good of something can start the healing process. At Lake Gregory Elementary we would face the fear and start the healing. No one ever got anything done by simply sitting idle. We knew the problem, now we had to
make it an opportunity to start our school community healing. There would be challenges; every step would be a baby step.

To make “place” meaningful one needs to get their bodies and minds into it. The more we experience it the more meaningful a place is. It doesn’t matter where in the world you are, any place can be meaningful. Experiencing nature or urban cities you need to step outside yourself and immerse yourself in it. Immersing in a place using hands-on and real world experiences helps me understand the world around me. Going into the forest, playing in a sandbox, lying in a meadow, observing closely a wildflower, or just watching a spider spinning its web gives me a feeling of freedom to explore and more deeply understand life and the world around me. Being stuck inside and just experiencing life through a textbook or classroom setting makes learning so much less interesting, less meaningful. There is a real world beyond the glass, for children who look, for those whose parents and teachers encourage them to see.

Webster defines “community” as a unified body of individuals. Community is a special “place”, where living things live, work, have fun and help one another. To live in a community and connect to a community are two different things. One can live somewhere and just be a hermit, not experiencing the culture of the community. To live in a community, you need to become familiar with or be a part of that community. It’s about joining heads, hands, hearts, and the places in which we dwell with competent affection.

As students and teachers we need to emphasize hands-on, real-world learning experiences. This approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of a school (Sobel, 2004, p. 7).

Community togetherness should be applied in the classroom as well as in your local world. To be a part of a community one needs to be involved; no one person can do it all, it takes team work and others need to be included for success.

I know from experience that being away from my home during the Old Fire and not being able to come home was miserable. I thought I could go visit and see people I hadn’t seen in a long time. I didn’t though I just didn’t do anything but watch the news reports. I guess I had a bit of depression. What I
wanted was to be around family and people that made me reflect back to normalcy.

Looking back on leaving my home I was just all alone. My husband Mike wanted to stay an extra day on the mountain until he went to work Monday. I left on Sunday and driving alone was very sad. As I was driving I kept thinking maybe I should turn back and be with my hubby. My friend was following me though and I kept on going. We were driving down the back way to Hesperia on the dirt road. Neither one of us knew how long we would have to be away from our homes. The road is long and very windy, kind of metaphor for what life is all about. When we reached the bottom the CHP was down there, not letting anyone go back up. The not knowing feeling is very frustrating and confusing. We headed towards Lucern Valley on the back road. We were in a terrific traffic jam for about 6 hours. They were diverting traffic from Las Vegas that way because the fire had reached down to the 15 freeway. I missed my family more than ever and wished I could just go home. I had no way of knowing when I would go home, the uncertainty gave me a feeling of insecurity.

Involvement

To be involved means to put your whole self into a project. Sometimes I can get too involved and I find it is very hard to simply say, “NO”. Sometimes I practice the word over and over but it usually turns out with a “YES”. I am getting better and have learned to pick my battles.

Lonely

Sometimes you can be in a crowd and be very lonely. Being away from home and not being able to go home left me with feeling of insecurity. I was with family, Mom, Dad, and my sisters. My brother Jim was fighting the fire, he is a Captain for the San Bernardino County Fire District. I was lonely and worried about him, too. I wanted to get home and get back to school and normalcy. I was homesick. I got so frustrated watching the television news reports, everything they reported seemed to be wrong. They would say they were at one location and be 50 miles away. I started growing depressed and scattered. I needed some uplifting I went to the rose garden at my parent’s house and started trimming the roses. Something is very calming about gardening. I decided to take my frustrations out on the roses. They needed trimming, boy did they get trimmed. Trimming roses is very good therapy. It felt good to be working and doing something positive.

I have always loved to be one with the earth. Getting dirty is very therapeutic. It felt good not being stuck to the “tube” watching bad news, it turned out to be the start of my healing.
One of the days that we were on evacuation I decided to go to the Evacuation Center to pick up my mail. This would be an experience I shall never forget. This was where everyone that was displaced from the fire would go and get their mail. As I got there I saw 100’s of people standing around waiting for the mail to come out. I wondered how they could keep all that mail straight and to the right people. I saw many people that I knew and they were as scattered as I was. The evacuation center was at Norton Air Force Base in a hangar. The hangar also housed many of the evacuee’s that had no other place to go. There were cots all over the hangar. Our custodian at my school and her husband were there, but they were volunteering to help with all that was needed. She has told me her story and many others about the evacuee’s and their stories too. I will call these stories Dolly’s Stories. I brought the whole meaning of community together. I was thankful I had a place to go and I thank God everyday for the blessing I have.

Whenever I think that life is cruel and I am having a “pity party” I think about all those people that don’t have as much as I do. I then make a list of Life’s Pros and Cons. The Pros usually win and my day goes so much better.

Being a Good Ambassador

In life a person is always representing something or someone. It is important to always be a good ambassador. If we go out into the world we are representing either our family, community, or school, even ourselves. I feel it is always important to make a good impression no matter where you are. Integrity needs to follow us throughout everyday. I believe this even more being a teacher.

Coming Together

After the fire the whole mountain community reconvened to celebrate our heroes. There were Fire Departments, Sheriff Departments, California Highway, Cal Trans, Water Districts, and our Rim of the World School District employees that all made such a difference in the outcome of the fire. They all worked together for a common goal, to save lives and homes. There were 1000’s of people showing their respect, we all had an attitude of gratitude for all of their efforts, it was truly overwhelming.

One of my personal hero’s was my brother Jim Johnstone. He is a Fire Captain for San Bernardino County Fire District. He was fighting the fire and had a strike team that would go out and hit certain areas. While fighting the Old Fire there were many days we didn’t hear from Jim. Seeing all of the terror of the fire on the television, my mind, as usual, was thinking the worst. I was very worried and concerned about him. I felt helpless, knowing he was fighting the fire and I was unable to help him in anyway. I have heard stories of how
great a Fire Captain Jim is, but he would never tell you how brave he is, he is very humble. He never toots his own horn. I was very proud of him.

Now that the fire was over we all had scars we had to heal. Coming together as a community was a beginning and seeing our brave heroes in front of us made my heart soar like an eagle. The meeting helped our community get back into the game of life. We had a lot to be thankful for.
APPENDIX C

HEARTS FOR THE FOREST: THE BEGINNING
heArts for the Forest: The Beginning

When we said goodbye to our students on Friday, October 24th, 2003 we anticipated seeing them the next Monday. Our intentions however were waylaid by the news of the Old Fire and the need to evacuate our mountain communities. Little did we know that it was going to be three weeks until we would see their sweet faces again.

Three weeks later, all of the staff of Rim of the World Unified School District met at the high school. There we had the Superintendent, the Fire Chief of the San Bernardino County, and counselors speak to us as a group about crisis counseling due the fact that many of our students and their families, and some teachers, had lost their homes in the fire. We anticipated that the students would still be anxious about the fire, being displaced during the evacuation, and coming home to a transformed forest. The student's most basic idea of what was familiar and safe had really changed. As teachers we knew school was like a common ground where students most often feel safe and secure. We were thankful the fire damaged none of our schools.

We then met as a staff at Lake Gregory Elementary for lots of hugs, and telling our stories to each other. We were reestablishing our family ties as a staff. One of our teachers did indeed lose her house in Hook's Creek, which brought the situation that much more close to home. We were able to get our kids home phone numbers so we could call each student and tell them how much we were looking forward to seeing them back at school the next day.

Our homecoming with students the following day at Lake Gregory was heartfelt. Students and teachers were glad to be back in a familiar and regular routine. The students really needed to tell their stories just as we had had to. During the first day we had our students write and draw about their experiences during the evacuation and their homecoming. We put aside time everyday for the kids to tell their stories. There was something very cathartic in each of us telling our personal adventures of what we saw, where we went, where we stayed, and what we found when we got home. We had a school-wide assembly inviting our local heroes such as police, sheriff, and fire personal. However, all of our ideas of who was a hero changed. Now heroes included S.C. Edison, The Gas Co., Water Companies, even regular people who chose to stay at our local "watering hole" The Stockade, which stayed open for calls and information. The local officials spoke, and were treated to rousing applause and cheers from everyone in attendance. Students even were asking them for their autographs. Many of these community helpers were parents of our students. Our sixth grade teacher, Penny Bassford, made a huge tree surrounded by a character representing each agency that helped save our community. Each student traced and cut out their hand on which they wrote a message of gratitude. These hands covered our Gratitude Tree,
like so many leaves of different sizes, shapes and colors. This tree remained up in our cafeteria for years afterwards. There was a sense of community that wasn’t there before. Community pride was at an all time high.

As the weeks went on we could tell that the students were still carrying a lot of anxiety about the fire and its aftermath. Every time we would hear the siren of an emergency vehicle students would get visibly upset, some to the point of crying and wanting to contact their parent immediately. Their body language told us as teachers of their worries and fears. There were so many students to talk to our school counselor was overwhelmed. We knew there would have to be another outlet for students to express their thoughts and feelings. Also, we wanted to think of a way to empower students to positive action rather than simply feeling like helpless victims in the aftermath of this destructive fire.

We talked to a colleague at the Audubon Society about ideas for reforestation efforts where students could be involved. She told us about visiting the Mount St. Helen’s Visitor Center after the eruption and purchasing a ceramic vase with the volcanic ash incorporated in the glaze. Proceeds from the sales of these ceramics went towards replanting trees on the mountain slopes. That gave us the idea to have the students create ceramic pieces incorporating the ash from the burned trees.

The students would then sell these pieces to the public, to raise money for purchasing trees to replant the burned areas. We wanted to include as many students as we could in this effort. We decided to design an after-school art and science program. The program would include local community members who could teach the students’ art techniques and fire ecology principles. We wrote a grant to the Rim Education Foundation for start up funds to buy clay, glaze, paint, paper, brushes and other art supplies. A meaningful and catchy name had to be thought of so of course we went to the students for their input. Thus, one of our fourth grade students Jennie Piorlo suggested Arts for the Forest. Since we needed to heal our hearts as well as help the forest we named our program “heArts for the Forest”.

We began talking to students asking if they would be interested in such a program. Their feedback, we felt, would be an integral part of how the program would be designed, developed, and implemented. The students were enthusiastic and excited. We presented our ideas to our Principal, Laurlee Hopper who was supportive and thrilled at the prospect of a creative after-school opportunity. We also presented at a staff meeting to gain the support of the other teachers. Permission slips went home with a letter explaining our after-school program and the goals for heArts for the Forest. We had an overwhelming response!
Beginning in February 2004 we started our program. Every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon from 2:30 until 5:00 p.m., we met in our fourth grade common area. We along with volunteer parents provided a nutricious snack while we all discussed our project for the day and the direction we wanted to develop our program. We started out with 40 enthusiastic students, which grew to 70 by the end of the school year.

Traveling out to the most affected areas of our forest to collect burned pieces of trees felt like going to the funeral of a dear friend. Our colleague, Bernadette Fuller, brought in a large burned log from her daughter's home in Cedar Glen, which was destroyed by the fire. The kids named this log, "The Mother Log". We provided these burned pieces to the children and invited them to begin drawing anything of their choosing. It was immediately apparent what was on their minds and hearts. Pictures were drawn of Highway 18 on fire, houses burning, families evacuating and smoke filled forests. As the children were creating their drawings the room was a buzz with their stories being retold to each other over and over again. We realized one means of creative self-expression often leads to another healing opportunity.

We needed a logo for our program. We wanted to design t-shirts with our logo on them for students and volunteers. Once again we wanted student input, so we had a contest. We invited the students to submit designs that reflected our name and goals. Twelve designs were received and as a group we voted on the one that we liked the best. The winning entry showed a tree with a heart in the middle and was designed by a mother and son team. They were really pleased, because they were going through some very difficult family issues, and this brought them together.

As the weeks went on the students developed their own techniques by experimenting with the materials provided. One such technique involved rubbing the burned wood between their hands and then onto a sheet of paper. They would use erasers to remove the ash, which created a negative picture. The burned forest, once something to be avoided and feared, was now the means used by the children to create masterpieces expressing what was lost and what could be gained. The students were literally immersing themselves in the ash of our burned trees by lifting their hands from the surface of the paper and anointing themselves by covering their faces and arms with the ash. They had a grand old time!

Our school is very fortunate to have a kiln for firing ceramics. When we started to work with the clay we gave the students creative freedom to make anything they wanted and to experiment with including the ash. This really became a powerful opportunity for them to take chances using their imaginations. There was no one right way to do it; everybody could be successful and the students became the teachers. As we progressed the
children put the ash into the glaze. They were so excited to see the transformation of each of their pieces after being fired. Their creations came to life!

We gained the support of many organizations and community helpers. Some of our heArts members went to the Rotary Club and spoke about our program. This effort on the part of the students won us some much-needed financial backing. The Mountain Arts Association, made up of professional artists in our community, offered to host a showing of the student’s work at a local gallery. The money raised from the sale of the artwork went back into the heArts for the Forest fund. We were the subject of articles in the local newspaper. The Rim High film class students visited our after-school program and included our kids in a video documentary about art in schools. This documentary was shown at a district-wide meeting and was met with great approval. The students were invited to sell their art pieces at numerous craft fairs, earth day celebrations and the 4th of July Bizarre. HeArts students were even included in the Crestline Fourth of July Parade. We were very proud of our kids and their efforts!

A sense of community was strong in our heArts. We grew in so many ways. Before we all took what we had for granted. Now we were meeting new community members that taught us that we were not alone. Bill Boone has been a mentor at our school for years helping kids in need. As a member of the Rotary and an avid bird watcher and botanist he volunteered to join us on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons. Our student’s parents Kim Wright and Rene Stephens volunteered with art and housekeeping. Other community volunteers included Cheryl Nagi from The Children’s Forest, Misty Reisenhoffer from the Mountain Art Association, Linda and Richard Guill, local crafters, Bernadette Fuller from our Meet the Master’s Program, Cheryl Shaw, a fellow teacher from Lake Arrowhead Elementary, Sarah Klingensmith, a teacher and fellow Masters Cohort member, Diane Bruns, a fellow teacher from Grandview Elementary, and Greg Pirolo, parent and fellow teacher who photographed students work, just to name a few.

As teachers we are able to donate a portion of our salary to the Rim Education Foundation, which funds grants for projects in our school district. Our initial working capital was getting low and the students had not started to sell their artwork as yet. We applied for a Rim Ed. Grant and received $800.00; the following year we were granted $1,000.00. On the night we received our first grant we presented our program to the Superintendent and the School Board. Much praise was expressed for such a unique and creative learning experience for our children.

A group of our heArts kids prepared a speech and presented our program at our Lake Gregory PTA meeting. With their support, and under the
umbrella of their non-profit status, our students began to sell their artwork during lunchtime and at various school functions. They were quite the sales people! They were responsible for setup and handling of money. They did an excellent job and raised $1,500.00 the first year! The parents were so grateful for having a place for their students to go after school and they were amazed at the heartfelt art that their children were creating. Led by parent, Susan Pirolo a spaghetti dinner and art auction was held in our school cafeteria. Numerous parents and community members attended and some of the artwork sold for over $100.00. Our heArts kids felt like stars. You can go into many homes and business even today and see their creations hanging or sitting there. Home Depot donated materials and displayed the kid’s works on a bulletin board at their store. We experienced such a transformation; we started out like sad puppies with our tails between our legs, facing a scorched landscape that we saw everyday and worried that it would happen again. Now we and the students were excited to come to school and proud to be part of a creative community who was making a difference.

As soon as school started in 2004 the students were relentless in wanting to start heArts for the Forest up again. It wasn’t until February 2005 that we were able to begin. Our group of students had changed somewhat and we had grown in numbers so we decided to have a more directed approach to the art itself. Local teachers and artists, like Sarah Klingensmith, came to our after-school program and taught ceramics and various techniques. She even brought the middle-school students from her class to help teach. It proved to be a rich experience for everyone. We met with similar success as the school year ended and for the second year our heArts kids made a grand showing in the Crestline Fourth of July Parade.

The fall of 2005 brought to heArts new opportunities. Crestline Communities Development Alliance/Mountain Beautiful invited us to join the Regional Park at Lake Gregory to participate in a tree-planting day. Families showed up and were so excited. We had grandparents, aunts, uncles, parents and kids of all ages wielding shovels, pushing wheelbarrows full of manure, and moving rocks to prepare a site for 20 new trees. When everyone took a break the ranger gave us all a lesson in forest and fire ecology, and explained why we were planting so many different kinds of trees native to our mountain region. The kids took true ownership of the tree they were planting. Sentiments were voiced about showing their grandchildren their trees 50 years from now and the fact that every time they walk around the lake they can say “hello” to their own tree. One student even named her tree “Eileen”, because it had a definite lean to it. More than ever, this experience helped us all establish a personal and caring relationship with our forest.
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW WITH NANCY MANNING
Interview with DeeDee Zetlmaier by Nancy Manning

When you think of the Old Fire what are some of the most meaningful, transformative memories?

One of my first memories was how lonely I was even though I was around family and friends. Not being able to get in touch with great mountain friends because everyone was scattered in different places was frustrating and hopeless. Not very many of us had cell phones, but we all got them while we were gone. It was like a life line that was missing. When driving back up the mountain for the first time I felt like we had been raped or scarred. My old friend the mountain had been tarnished and abused. It was a memory that haunts me to this day. I remember the guardrail, the silver metal lying on the ground with the wood burned out of it. I felt my sense of security had been damaged along with it. We were not in school for another week so Cal Trans could repair all of the guardrails. The new guardrails were so shiny against the stark baldness of our mountain. I picked up Cody from the airport, he was coming home for Thanksgiving, and he asked “Mom, what is that?” I said it was the new guardrail. It looked like a silver band holding up the mountain side. Everything was an adjustment. Seeing the burned trees on Highway 138 was a very sad sight, one of the largest ones looked like a black monster ready for the attack, but it was lonely because he was standing all by himself. Seeing Santa’s Village was haunting. I used to work there in my teens and I had so fond memories of my youth and the whole spirit of Christmas. Now driving past my old stomping grounds was devastating. Homes and trees on both sides of the road were completely burned down. Santa’s Village was spared, but many areas around it were vanished except for the blackened char. Hooks Creek was surreal. Driving down there one day I could only see chimney’s where houses used to be. Maria’s house was gone and her BMW was still sitting in her front yard. My neighborhood was untouched. I wondered why we had been spared when other hadn’t been so lucky. I remember the reunion of all the fire agencies after everyone came home. The whole mountain community was there at the High School Gym. We were so grateful to all of them who fought so hard to save our home. It was the beginning of healing my mind’s wounds.

Was your view about your community different after the fire?

I felt a stronger tie to help my community, I wanted to be more involved, to make a positive impact or change. My view was more fragile; it’s like
growing up, you think you’re invincible and all of a sudden you realize you’re not.

How did the whole evacuation experience affect you as a person? As a teacher?

It made me much more appreciative of my environment and my community. My attitude of gratitude grew. I realized how much I need the people around me and my profession. I thought we maybe wouldn’t be teaching with the same people, at the same school and with the same students. When I visited the evacuation center at Norton AFB and saw so many of our students and families I realized that a big part of our community was still intact. I guess what makes up the fabric of our lives isn’t just the physical environment but the relationships that you hold dear. I care more about the smaller things in life more than I used to, I want kids to care more, too.

What were your thoughts and feelings as your family, neighborhood, and class/school (community) came back together (returned home)?

I was very excited to see all my kids and reestablish our relationships. I had wondered how they had been and if they had been hurt in anyway. I was anxious to see everyone just to know that everyone was okay. It felt good to be concerned about someone other than myself. I was anxious to get back into a regular routine. I really felt the healing power of everyone around us, our community, our school, our neighborhood.

What kind of activities/things were you thinking might help your students (you) deal with the aftermath of the fire?

I thought that writing and drawing everyday in a journal might help the students reflect back and be able to see their thoughts in words and pictures. I thought that this could be a tool for healing their sorrows. Artwork was a great avenue to the healing process. I was really very concerned that the students would have lingering affects from the evacuation and now living in a burned out environment. As a teacher I felt a strong responsibility to find out what the kids needed and to help them heal, and help myself heal.

How and why did you work with a partner to design heArts for the Forest?

Personally, if I had my choice I would not attempt to facilitate a project by myself. Having a partner is the only way to go. Having my best friend as a partner makes all of the difference. I felt Nancy was the chief and I am an excellent Indian helper. We realized that many of our students
needed a creative activity beyond the classroom to feel less like victims and more in control of our lives. Nancy and I came up with an idea of an after-school art and science program that would involve our students and community members. We hoped to raise money by selling our art creations to help buy trees to replant the forest. This seed of an idea needed the nurturing spirit of more that one person. Nancy has been my partner in teaching from the beginning, so it was just a natural fit. It was a fantastic journey.

How did you feel about working with Nancy on this project (personally and as a teacher?)

I would have never attempted anything like this with anyone else. Nancy is my soul-mate, what one person doesn’t think of the other one does. Personally, I would do anything for her; she has so much goodness inside her. I love her.

What do you consider the benefits of collaborating on projects and collaborative teaching?

The whole is so much more than the sum of its parts. Two or more hearts and heads are better than one any day. You have someone to bounce energy and ideas off of. Working collaboratively gives you a courage and insight beyond just yourself. You each bring your unique talents and views to the mix. Whatever each of us thinks we are lacking the other one has the compassion to fill in.
APPENDIX E

STUDENT SURVEYS
Student Surveys

After the Old Fire when students came back to school Nancy Manning and I gave our fourth grade students a questionnaire asking meaningful heartfelt questions about fire and our community.

1. How did you feel about your place and your community before the Old Fire?

Most of the 40 students surveyed thought that our mountain community was safe and beautiful. They thought it was a fun place to be. They really didn’t think that a fire would happen and thought nothing could go wrong in their community.

2. How did you feel about your community after the Old Fire when you got to come home?

Most of the students felt sad, scared, and happy to be home. They thought it was scary to see all of the burned trees and some of the homes were burnt as well. Most of them were glad to be home and that they had a home to go to.

3. What things in your community mean the most to you?

Most of the students answered their family, friends, neighbors, school and the animals mean the most to them in their community. Some stated they would miss their church and the people that go there. They would feel real sad if any of these factors were missing in their community.

4. What would you miss the most if you couldn’t see or have it anymore?

Most of the students would miss their family, house, friends, toys and animals. Many thought they would miss the forest around them and the walks around the lake. They would hate if they couldn’t ever see or touch these things ever again.
APPENDIX F

ARTWORK OF STUDENTS
Hope
APPENDIX G

MAP OF OLD FIRE
REFERENCES


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