

Kathy G. Short, 2004

Generative Theme Connections

This engagement was adapted from the work of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. It is designed to help students clarify their own stance toward a course of study in which they are involved, to develop a sense of community with the class, and to let class members begin to shape the direction the course will take. The engagement can focus around a particular concept (e.g. literacy, prejudice, family) or around an issue or question that is central to a particular unit, inquiry study, or course.

This course focuses on inquiry and so we will explore your connections to the term "learning" for this engagement. Working individually for 5 minutes, list as many words as you can think of which you associate with "learning" and which for some reason or another seem important to you.

Using the list of words that you generated, select the words which are most important to you personally (no more than five). Don't be concerned with what someone else may say or what you think any other person would expect (including me). Choose words which are genuinely important to you.

When everyone is finished, each of you, without comment, one at a time, goes to the chalkboard and writes your words until everyone has written their words on the board.

Still working as individuals, read over the list of words on the chalkboard several times. Try to group them according to some logical and meaningful system of organization. Include as many words as you can in large groups or categories. Give each of these categories a title if you can think of one. Be prepared to discuss your system of organization and why you included each word. You may not be able to include all of the words listed on the board, but include as many as can reasonably be included within your broad categories. Do not discuss what you are doing with your peers yet.

When you are finished, find a partner and go over your list. Be sure that each of you explains your list thoroughly to the other. You may want to revise your list after talking with your partner. If so, you may do so. Talk about what you learn from each other's lists. Try to explain why your lists differ or why they are similar. Remember there are no right or wrong combinations, only different ones.

Write a reflection for your research journal about what you learned from this engagement -- about yourself, about your partner and your classmates, and about learning.