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ABSTRACT

Students in the Culebra Road GED/JOBS (General Educational Development/Job Opportunities and Basic Skills) class, an adult education class for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) students, created their own website. First, students completed a computer literacy survey to gauge their computer skills. Next, students were encouraged to jump right in to the process of exploring the Internet. Computer novices were paired with more experienced students, who served as mentors. After the students had become comfortable exploring websites of interest to them, they were encouraged to write about moments in their past and package their stories into a uniform class web page. To date, the web page contains the following: Student Stories from the Spring of '98; Poetry from the Heart, What Welfare Reform Means to Me; Want Ads for Moms like Us; Our ABC's of Success, Our Children; What Education Means to Us, Great Recipes from Our Class; a Typical Day for a Culebra Mom, Our Class Project "Something to Think About"; and Our Stories from the Project. The project helped motivate students to develop important academic and workplace competencies and increased their sense of empowerment. (The student questionnaire is appended.) (MN)

1997-8 Project FORWARD Project-based Learning Project Summary

http://members.aol.com/CulebraMom/mujer.html

Mothers United for Jobs Education and Results

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Artwork by Cindy Barrientes

"Girl, this isn't a GED class...it's a place where we work on our lives."

Lisa Peña talking to a new student
June 21, 1998

"I've never used an internet but I've heard from friends that talk about it and it sounds kool. Bad things that have been found are people hiring a hit-person to kill someone. I find it scaring and would be afraid to use an internet since I never used it before. And I don't know anything about it."

Margarita

"It opens your mind to many things. The bad thing about it is the "Porno". Because our children can easily get into it. That is a bad example for our children."

Diane

"It just feels great that other people read your story and know what your doing and where your heading to..."

Veronica

"I feel that the internet could be a way of life in the near future...I also feel that you will soon need the internet to do all your shopping, schooling. I think that you will not be able to get any information without an internet service and a computer."

Martha

"Don't even talk to me about those green and red squigglies."

Dora
(Commenting to Becky about the grammar and spell marks on her MS Word document.)

"My knowledge of the computer has changed alot. I knew nothing about computers. I did not even know what a mouse was for. I could not even touch it, because I did not know how to use it. I've learned that this is an unbelievable, endless source..."

Annette

Brief Description of Project

a) **Title:** MUJER (Mothers United for Jobs, Education and Results): A Student Webpage

b) **Abstract of Project:** Using the Internet as a medium, this project consisted of creating an exciting and innovative student generated Web page that takes the adult education student out of the traditional educational environment of books, drills and memorization and into the world of interactive creativity, exploration and personal expression on the Internet.

c) **Program background**

The Culebra Road G.E.D./JOBS (Job Opportunities and Basic Skills) class is an adult education class taught for clients of the T.A.N.F. (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program. On March 1, 1998 the JOBS program was transferred from the Texas Workforce Commission to the Alamo Workforce Board. The board granted the contract for the JOBS program to SER Jobs for Progress Inc. of San Antonio. These changes are a result of legislative mandate in HB 1863. We are located in San Antonio, Texas.

Last year our program enrolled 56 students. It is run by Northside I.S.D. and has been in existence for seven years. This program provides adult students with remedial academic instruction (GED preparation) along with job preparedness training and parenting skills.

c) **Student Profile**

- Age: 17-24 17 Students
  25-44 20 Students
- Ethnicity
  Black 3
  Hispanic 29
  White 5
  Asian 0
- Sex 100% female

Description

1) Rationale

Over the past two years students began to show more and more interest in the Internet. What was it? What does "www" mean? What am I missing out on? They saw references to the Internet everywhere: on Coke Cans, on ads for the movie Titanic, and on the radio.

In addition, many students were coming into class saying that their children were now on the Internet at school and some of their children even had elementary school class webpages. One student, Stacy, had a two-and-a-half year old enrolled in a computer class at her child's day care entitled "Gigglebytes." Two of these students brought the page address (URL) to me and asked me what to do with it. Another knew that you needed a phone line to get on the Internet (She had heard her brother-in-law speak about getting a second line at home.). Students put two and two together and assumed that you could dial the URL on a regular phone and get "something."

As we began to talk about it, students became more and more curious about what could be done on the Internet and, particularly, how they could participate in it. I had recently gotten a computer at home and was finally getting a lot of online time at home. I was interested in developing this potential in class and was particularly interested in what would/could happen in class if this powerful access was made available to the students. Indeed, there were possibilities, but I had little idea what they were.

Surfing the Internet can be an incredible experience for the uninitiated; I felt that an even more powerful learning experience could be gained by allowing students to cross the "digital divide" by getting them involved online with the creation of their own class webpage.

2) What the project actually did:

The Culebra JOBS students created their own Internet webpages.

3) Describe each step of the process:

- ✓ **NOTE: The following step-by-step explanation of the project reflects the project's development after an initial period of "technical difficulties" discussed below under "Issues, Afterthoughts and Helpful Hints."**

1) **Survey:** Students usually enter my class with very limited knowledge about the Internet and computers in general. In my Student Orientation Packet, I include a computer literacy survey (appendix 1) to gage where a student is when she enters class.

2) **Jump Right In:** Regardless of their computer knowledge coming into class, I encourage students to jump right in and get online with a computer; I usually have a more experienced student mentor the new student. The new student picks up basic computer skills (navigating the desktop screen, pointing and clicking, etc.) and moves right into more advanced skills.

I encourage students to dive in and pick any topic they want to explore. I emphasize that they can find information on just about anything. Most are interested in movies or tejano music stars, so they start there. Since they are working with a seasoned student who knows the ropes, the pair usually moves straight for a search engine and begins to look around. Rather than starting students with drills in basic computer skills and moving them up into using the Internet, I've found that students advance much more quickly when they jump right in. Skills that can be tedious if learned in isolation (typing, point/click exercises, tutorials in computer basics) are picked up "on the fly" in context of being challenged by more advanced skills (e.g. limiting searches on a search engine).

3) **Students "Write Their Lives":** In my class students are encouraged to write about moments in their past. Classroom activities and past student projects have emphasized personal introspection and exploration. New students feel liberated

by an open classroom atmosphere where past mistakes and hardships are validated and they usually begin writing quickly. Their orientation packet includes an exercise that elicits stories from their lives. These stories gave us a lot of raw material to build from when we began to venture into webpage publication.

4) **Educate: Internet 101:** For this project I asked students what they might like to share with an audience on the Internet. Of course, at the start, many students had no idea just what the Internet was and how big the audience is, so we spent time sharing ideas in class about the Internet.

A few students had some online knowledge from relatives while others shared their perspectives from movies and TV. As a teacher, it is important to get a grasp on where students are getting their information. Movies and TV often give students the impression that the Internet is a bad thing; comments from student surveys (appendix 1) show that some students believe that the Internet is a very invasive and dangerous tool; people are stalked, and their privacy jeopardized. Canned television newsmagazines (e.g. Hardcopy) seem to do more to emphasize the exceptional negative aspects than highlight the powerful and positive potential of the Internet.

5) **Put the Knowledge to Use :** With the class pretty savvy on the Internet and already doing a lot of writing in class, I asked them how they thought they might be able to package all this into a uniform class webpage. Past projects and classroom writing assignments had always been very "classroom-centered" and rarely reached outside the family and friends of my students. With this project, I hoped to assist students in moving beyond writing that enriched their own environment in the classroom and at home to truly creating a forum for themselves to reach out to a huge audience. We spoke at length about this and debated about just what an audience that big would really be interested in reading. Rather than searching elsewhere for topics to write on, I encouraged students to continue writing about topics they knew all about: their lives, their children and

their favorite recipes. This was a good starting place and students began to produce a uniform webpage immediately.

To date (June 1998) the following links are featured on the class webpage:

- Student Stories from the Spring of '98
- Poetry From the Heart
- What Welfare Reform Means To Me
- Want Ads for Moms Like Us
- Our ABC's of Success
- Our Children
- What Education Means to Us
- Great Recipes From Our Class
- A Typical Day For A Culebra Mom
- Our Class Project "Something to Think About"
- Our Stories From the Project

6) **Get the Software:** You've got the students interested and they are writing; where do you go from there? Creating a webpage means using webpage-editing software. I choose Aolpress from America Online because it's free (download from <www.aolpress.com>) and very easy for students to use. Download it beforehand and get familiar with it by creating your own page; then introduce students to it. The editing commands are very similar to what is found on any word-processing program. Students who are familiar with Microsoft Works or Word will find a very similar environment.

7) **Publish It:** Publishing a site from your computer to the Internet takes webpage hosting space. Most Internet Service Providers (ISP's) offer free webpage hosting space. ISP's like Earthlink and America Online offer ten megabytes, which is a lot. I have America Online and simply published my class pages from home.

Impact on Program

a) What effects did the project have?
b) What was learned?
c) How has your program changed?
d) How have the participants involved in the project changed?

A strong focus of this project rested on the idea that academic and workplace competencies can be enjoyably learned in an technological environment that, at the same time, will bring under-prepared learners up to speed for the twenty-first century. With an increasingly demanding job market and a decreasing safety net of public assistance for students to fall back on, this project aimed to help students prepare to get good jobs or transition into higher education with few fears of approaching a computer or navigating the Internet. Extensive student generated projects, such as this class home page, produce many of the skills employers say workers need for success in the twenty-first century.

In addition to meeting the needs of employers, a student home page that allows learners to share their life stories, day to day concerns and stories of their children addresses the findings of the National Institute For Literacy's Equipped For the Future project. From a poll of 1500 adults who were asked what they felt was most needed to know to be competent in a global economy, E.F.F. compiled four purposes for adult learning: [1]

- increased *access* to information
- the ability to *voice* ideas and opinions confidently
- take *independent action*
- the ability to *bridge to the future* by learning how to keep up with a changing world.

This project used technology to meet these needs by:

- providing a medium that opened learners' access and perspectives to the world outside their immediate world;
- creating a forum where their past mistakes were validated and valued, not only by the immediate community, but by a world wide audience;

[1] Stein, Sondra Gayle. Equipped for the Future: A Reform Agenda for Adult Literacy and Learning. National Institute for Literacy. Washington: 1997

- creating dynamic opportunities to independently learn new skills while at the same time supporting their roles as parent of children using technology daily in the classroom;
- strengthening their ability to transition in an advanced, 21st century workplace environment, not only as consumers of information, but also as creators in a state-of-the-art medium. Technology became one less thing they had to worry about at school or work.

All of these factors boil down into one main achievement for students: Increased empowerment. By intimately working and interacting with state-of-the-art technology and using it to advertise their progress and validate their past, students made incredible gains in the "soft-skills" so hard to teach with traditional methods.

Students were able to change the power paradigm in their lives; now, instead of case managers, friends in college, and even their own children being the ones in control of high technological communication, my students were the ones now taking the lead. The change in the paradigm was most apparent with our small community of case managers that share office space with the class. Mid-way through the project, the case manger unit received upgrades in their computers to two gigabyte, internet connected computers. Of course, they received no training in these computers and were at a loss as to how to use them.

We made an informal deal to trade training time for student time on the computers. We literally had case mangers receiving basic training in Microsoft Word and the Internet side by side with the students. Now, case managers very often call directly on students for advice. While case managers are at lunch or in meetings, students are able to gain time on the computers and work on their websites.

In short, we were able to turn the problems and impediments associated with a project that began so precariously and ill-supported into positive, constructive moments. Students were empowered by being on the same playing field as their case managers and, at the same time, we were able to gain the access to computers and the Internet that failed to come from other areas.

Issues, Afterthoughts and Helpful Hints

a) Describe any problems and how you resolved them?

In August of 1997, I jumped into this project initiative with the best of intentions. I had some big ideas on what could be done in class with an Internet class project. Supported by the FORWARD cadre, I felt confident that I could find support from my school district to make a student generated webpage a reality in my class. The project would require access to an up-to-date-computer, a dedicated phone line, and an Internet service provider. Eleven months later, we still lack these vital components. Internet access and access to appropriate hardware/software needs are the biggest impediments keeping adult educators and their students off the internet;[2] my class was no exception. Though school administrators showed interest and excitement for the project, even promising to assist the class in making the project a reality, in the end, we received no support.

Looking back on the project, I feel I would have done nothing differently. Though we were met with what seemed like insurmountable odds for producing a class webpage (namely, no Internet access), I still feel everyone involved gained an amazing amount of knowledge. Students gained an incredible amount of quality experiences throughout the project. We had many incredible moments ranging from extreme frustration (We were ready to go one afternoon to an Internet lab when we where called by the school district and told that we could not use their facility.) to the powerful experiences of receiving e-mail responses from people from as far away as Finland and Australia. It was a bold project, but, for me, one that produced monumental achievements.

Helpful hints for others interested in such projects are obvious: secure funding for or access to hardware, software and Internet access.

[2] Rosen, David. "How Easy is it for Adult Educators to Use the Information Superhighway?" February 25, 1996. http://www2.wgbh.org/MBCWEIS/LTC/ALRI/Cruising.html

OUTCOME EVALUATION
PART I

What Worked ? What Didn't ? And Why?

Project Phase ↓	*What Worked*	*What Got in the Way*	*What it Takes*
1. Stimulus: Initial discussion of an idea; suggestions	Most students seemed very excited by the idea, though few really knew what the Internet was.	The lack of knowledge of what the Internet was and the communication potential it has.	Careful explanation and the right approach to introducing the idea of using such a powerful tool.
2. Planning (process or scope and sequence of project)	We seemed to plan the project in an *ad hoc* manner. Students gradually began to see a vision of what they could do with their own webpage only after they began to work on it.	The fact that we did not have a computer the students could work on directly.	Models of other similar webpages helped shape students' vision of what they wanted to do. Perseverance and patience waiting on a computer
3. Getting to Work (who will do what, time line)	Once the project was up and running, students managed their time on the computers very well. Students wanted to place their own material on the computers rather than have the "best" typist enter it. Decisions on what to put on the pages evolved naturally in class. Once we were up and running, students managed their time on the project well. Since it was intimately linked with their first experiences on a state-of-the-art computer, students mixed work on the project with "surfing" in general.	Our time line was initially sporadic because of the infrequency of computer access. Later, some students "hogged" their time on the computer and the class had to devise a schedule system that still did not work all the time. Occasionally, a student would postpone working on their part of the project (e.g. Typing up their personal story) and instead spend their time "surfing."	Budget time with a class schedule on the computer. Continually prompting some students to stay on task with the project.

4. Doing Inquiry, data collection – research	Students were very self motivated, very interested in inquiring into how to use the computers, Internet, search engines, etc.	Students were less interested in researching and working on a "What Welfare Reform Means to Me" link. I suspect this was because this was "my idea".	Let students have firm control over project direction. The minute you try to turn it to a certain purpose you have in mind as a teacher, you seem to take away some of the vitality.
5. Shaping Project as a group (designing materials, planning event)	Team consensus was strong on design and content of webpages. Students went into the project with few preconceived ideas about design or content of a webpage because, for the most part, the Internet was new to them.	Some students cooperated in what others wanted to do mainly because they didn't have a grasp of what was going on (They were new to class and had little idea what the Internet was.) Overall, planning was difficult because of the initial problems getting the project on its feet (Lack of computers with Internet access).	True, democratic control over a project takes equal education on the subject. I suspect that things may have taken a different turn if the students who were less interested in the project early on because of unfamiliarity with the Internet had had a hand in the initial planning.
6. Developing Written Materials	Students avidly produced material for the webpage once they saw their work begin to appear on the Internet.	Occasionally, they would produce "too much" material and quantity would over run the quality of their output. They wanted to put *everything* on the web.	Help students make conscientious decisions about content and structure of webpage work.
7. Pulling it all Together (collecting, organizing)	A few key students guided the structure and helped with collection of materials. Lists of "who has done what" were put on our whiteboard to prompt other students to "get on the ball."	Some students dragged their feet on their contributions. Nevertheless, this was less of a problem because most of the webpages could stand alone without everyone contributing input.	Because of the constraints we faced, collection and organization of material was less of a problem at the start. I wasn't sure at first when or if material would ever reach the Internet, so I collected material on an *ad hoc* basis and did much of the organization myself. Later, when publishing results were guaranteed, students took over page structure and collection of material.

8. Dealing with Unexpected Problems and Issues	Students were angered and became despondent because of broken promises and false starts on the project due to the lack of Internet access. We could do nothing about the initial restraints, so we dropped the project idea and moved on to another project. When we did manage to gain access, we picked the idea back up, though most of the original students were now no longer in class.	Students were used to frustrations associated with bureaucracies. They adapted quickly and did not let it get in the way. When I had so much anger built up over project constraints, they told me to "get over it."	To use an adult education cliche, "Students are experts in their own reality." They coped well with project difficulties. They sometimes dealt with it better than the teacher!
9. Monitoring Progress	Once the project was up and running, students did a good job of keeping tabs on webpage development and input.	Monitoring progress was difficult because of the long timeline and student turnover associated with it.	Allow "peer pressure" in the class to motivate students who may not be pulling their share.
10. Putting on the Big Event	Once students were getting results, they worked prodigiously to produce webpage content.	Since this was a continuing project, there was no real 'Big Event." Obviously, having no Internet access for a while meant there was no "event" at all.	Provide students with the resources it takes to "get the job done."
11. Reflection and Feedback	Project work on the Internet can naturally be very dynamic. It elicits much feedback from the students. Students are not "making up" skills they did not gain in school, but are exploring "uncharted waters," side by side with their teacher.	Because of our limitations, initial reflection on the project was difficult in the first stages. Once we were up and running, students were sometimes reluctant to take time out and provide feedback on their experiences online.	Develop an assessment instrument that helps monitor students' progress. Take time out to have students write about their experiences in journals.

12. Evaluation of the specific skills individual students acquired through the process	Once we were up and running on the Internet on a daily basis, evaluation was very easy. I could monitor who was taking a lead and mentoring others. Students commented on their progress on their weekly self-evaluation sheets (Project FORWARD Personal Discovery). They constantly noted publishing their work and working with e-mail as their most enjoyable and biggest educational gains.	Early on, it was difficult to monitor progress on students because our access to the Internet and webpage software was so sporadic. Unfortunately, most of the students who did the initial brainstorming of the project (Webpage name, material for the first links, etc.) never got to see their ideas hit the web.	Evaluation of the specific skills for individual students takes consistent work on the project. Ensure that students will have a fair chance of working and growing with the medium. Once you have relatively unfettered Internet access, skill evaluation is easy. Since students usually come in with little experience on the Internet, they exhibit tremendous growth. If access is hindered or punctuated by periods of inactivity, you'll be monitoring more coping skills than academic skills.

OUTCOME EVALUATION
PART II

Directions:

Which skills are the participants acquiring as part of doing the project? Please list <u>what students can now do that they couldn't do before</u> as well as the knowledge that they have gained as a result of being involved in project work

A. Basic skills

a) Reading

Students read complicated computer Internet template instructions, word processing commands, e-mail instructions, message boards, participated in chat-rooms and used a variety of emoticons, and proofed each other's work.

b) Writing

Students composed a variety of webpages using webpage software and MS Word. Communicated with others via e-mail, message boards and chat rooms. Wrote candidly about many personal issues for an international, worldwide audience.

c) Math

Students manipulated the size of webpage "gif" images by adjusting their height and width. The measurements had to be proportionate and this took a bit of keen estimating and calculation.

d) Oral Communication Skills

- Shared hints on hot webpages with the class and were asked to explain them in-depth.
- Peer tutored each other on opening e-mail accounts and on many aspects of Internet and MS Word use.
- Followed oral instructions from me on many aspects of computer use, from launching programs, and using e-mail to closing files and safely shutting down the computer.
- Brainstormed with each other verbal content, format, and graphic representation of webpages

B. Employment Related Skills and Strategies (SCANS PLUS)

Please provide specific examples for each category and explain what students did, how they did it, and what they took away from the experience.

a) Identifying and using resources:

Students came away from this project with a good understanding the following resources:

- General computer use: What it can do, what the Interent has to offer
- Using email and various email carriers and their advantages and disadvantages
- Search and meta-search engines like Yahoo and Dogpile

After using the computers on the project, the students said they "had" to have a computer at home.

b) Working as part of a team

- Worked as a group on computers.
- Class came to group decisions on webpage content.
- Budgeted a time schedule for computer use.
- Acted as mentors for each other on computer use. Students who were more adept at using one program or another mentored the others. Acted as mentors sometimes to their own case managers.
- Came to a group consensus on webpage content, format and art.
- Peer edited each other's work.
- Amiably budgeted time on one computer.

c) Handling data and other information (collecting data, identifying, accessing, and organizing information)

- Organized the webpage contents and collected the writings from each other to place under the following hyperlinks:
    - Student Stories from the Spring of '98
    - Poetry From the Heart
    - What Welfare Reform Means To Me
    - Want Ads for Moms Like Us
    - Our ABC's of Success
    - Our Children
    - What Education Means to Us
    - Great Recipes From Our Class
    - A Typical Day For A Culebra Mom
    - Our Class Project "Something to Think About"
    - Our Stories From the Project
- Organized content and arrangements of website.
- Maintained and updated site as new students entered the class.
- Though the project existed primarily on a hard drive and Internet space, students did maintain various folders designated for writings to be published. Students also kept a folder for hot websites they printed out.

c) Using technology

Project was computer based. Students used Pentium processor computers, a laser printer, copy machines, and a fax machine.

Students:

- Interpreted dense computer instructions and became familiar with the environment (desktop icons/toolbars).
- Navigated through complicated operating systems of computer; excelled at understanding e-mail/message board systems and effectively using search engines on the Internet
- Came to an better understanding of the operation and limitations of computers and applied this technology keenly to meet the project objectives.

Overall, students strengthened their transition to an advanced, 21st century, workplace environment not only as *consumers* of information but also *creators* in a state-of-the-art medium.

Most importantly, technology became one less thing they had to worry about at school or work.

e) Managing diversity

The class was from ethnically and socio-economically diverse backgrounds (from multigenerational welfare to middle class). They exhibited no problems in these areas. Their one common factor, being TANF moms, held them together as a tight group.

Students were able to overcome the economic diversity that often contributes to the lack of access to technology. Computer access and the Internet were worlds my students were only aware of as outside observers. They were able to change the "access" paradigms with their case managers, friends in college, and even their own children who were using computers at school. In many aspects, this project allowed my students to take the lead in using technology. Casemanagers who had received little or no training were taking computer hints from students. One student was able to email a former student who was now attending San Antonio College and had email at the college. She enjoyed bridging the gap between "GED Class" and the college.

f) Advocacy (for self; others, for what's right)

By "writing their lives" students were advocating for themselves and their families. Past mistakes and hardships were validated and qualified as lessons to pass on to others. Students had a forum to communicate "wrongs" in their lives, families and communities and advocate for what is "right."

g) Other Skills (such as handling stress and dealing with difficult people)

Students had to deal with the stress of having several "false starts" on the project. We worked together to overcome impediments by using computers at the library.

C. What transfer did you see to other important skills needed .....?

1. for the GED?

- Essay writing: grammar/structure/mechanics
- Editing skills:

  "I want my story to look "right" to the rest of the world who may see it."
- Critical analysis of a system (the computer/Internet.) How to interpret and use unfamiliar information:

  "How do you limit a search on a search engine?"

  "What are the "key-words" in what I'm trying to find?"
- Problem solving:

"How can I put this essay I wrote on our old computer (MS Works 2.0) on to the Internet?"

2. to find a job and make it through the interview?

- Confidence with various forms of high technology they will use when they transfer to work. When a student is asked about their familiarity with technology, they have a webpage they can bring up and show off in an interview.
- Ability to speak candidly about past mistakes. Less ashamed of dropping out of school, spending time in jail, having a spotty work history. More confident that things "have really changed."

3. to manage life and negotiate bureaucracies

Confidence on the Internet:

- opened students to a new world of access to information they want and need everyday to manage their lives.

  "I found a great 'Ask a nurse' on the Internet. I got some information on migraines."

  "Now I can keep up with the soap operas I miss everyday in class. I don't have to be late from lunch anymore!"

- And negotiated bureaucracies:

  "I found some great information on the GED test online."

Students also looked friends or relatives in the various prisons.

D. Overall, what difference has project work made for your class?

1.) What have been the greatest benefits for learners?

As illustrated by comments on the first page, students showed an enormous change in their knowledge of and outlook on the Internet. Students moved from seeing it as a potentially invasive source of danger to a full understanding of its benefits and potential for access to hard to reach information. This change was due to their knowledge base moving from only hearing about it in the media to actually using it in class.

2.) What have been the greatest barriers for learners?

Students had the greatest difficulties interpreting and understanding some of the commands and instructions associated with the computer and the Internet. Using their e-mail and editing their webpages called for them to read and interpret dense, sometimes poor, instructions.

E. In what ways has working on projects influenced you as a teacher?

1.) Your general perception of what it means to teach and to learn -

Project-based learning has given me a methodology that allows my students to get what they *really* need when they come back to school. Of course, students usually come to class with a very specific goal: to get their GED. With time and class discussion on past life experiences with relationships and work, they begin to realize that there are a variety of less defined needs they must obtain in order to transition successfully into higher education or work; obtaining their GED is not enough. Project work produces the "soft-skills" that are so hard to obtain with traditional instruction. Strong self-esteem, working within a team and having the motivation and courage to take on new challenges are just some of the areas our class work with projects has addressed and have proven to be the skills my students need to transition from welfare to school or work.

"Learning" took on new meaning for my students and me. By addressing issues that were so close to their lives, students became active creators in their own learning. They worked like never before toward perfection. They really wanted to see this project come to completion, and this drive produced a strong sense of personal responsibility to get the job done, solid self-esteem when pages were published and vital interpersonal skills to bring it all together.

2.) The way you teach ...

From: Green. A "Project-based Learning and the GED." Focus on Basics 2.B (1998)

> "This (project-based, participatory) approach means I had to look at my classroom in a different light. For my students, being outspoken and active in events that affect them is a key to mobility whether they are in the foodstamp office, the laundry mat, or their child's elementary school. If they advocate for themselves, their sometimes very marginal lives on public assistance are threatened. When I began teaching, I saw talking, interaction and commotion in the class due to outside issues as deviance from learning. I felt safe with teacher guided activities that produced quiet, individualized learning. Marshaling their energy and concerns into a quiet classroom where "learning" would begin with open GED textbooks was often difficult. Now, I capitalize on this energy and information and use it as raw material for student work. Furthermore, students who once expected straightforward test preparation, but usually dreaded it, find the open, participatory environment more conducive to learning. Students who had difficulty writing half a page on a regular GED topic were amazed to find themselves writing four or five pages of analysis on their own lives for our project...because it truly seemed applicable to their lives.

3.) What skills, knowledge or insights have you, as a teacher, gained through this experience?

As with my past projects, MUJER has shown me the extreme potential of project-based learning. When contrasted with traditional teaching approaches typical to ABE/ASE classrooms, I've seen this project facilitate enormous learning and personal growth, particularly in:

- ✓students' self concept.
- ✓the hard to "teach" SCANS competencies.
- ✓participatory, team building.
- ✓using technology as a bridge out of the welfare mindset; giving students access to a world of information and communication usually denied to them.

One insight I gained from the experience is that extensive, class projects take support, both from administrators and fellow teachers. Even when support is there, there may not be the financing needed to fully realize the project's potential. This adventurous project would not have happened if I had not supplied all of the needed tech support (a computer, Internet access, ISP, web space to publish). The limited funding indicative of adult education means that instructors may have to go "beyond the call of duty" to improvise

and provide students with innovative instruction. Too often, unfortunately outside support for the "big picture" may not be there to make projects happen.

Deborah D'Amico summarizes the need for program support below:

> "Successful programs identified in a U,S. Department of Education study of JOBS programs include 'a clear concept of the educational and other needs of welfare recipients, support to teachers' ongoing efforts to innovate and experiment in the classroom, and adequate funding to put innovative ideas into practice (Quint. Forthcoming 1998).' "(D'Amico *Adult Education and Welfare Reform Initiatives: A Review of Research, Practice and Policy* (1997)

F. Impact on your program

1. How has the program where you teach facilitated or hindered the success of your program? What helped you and your students a great deal? What could have been better?

Unfortunately, my program did more to hinder than to facilitate this project. Though school administrators showed interest and excitement for the project, even promising to assist the class in making the project a reality by supporting our efforts to get computers and Internet access, in the end we received little support to make it happen. My class was even promised access to an Internet computer lab; access, which in the last minute, was pulled. Students reacted like they usually did in situations like this: they felt they were kept out because they were "welfare moms who couldn't be trusted."

Conversely, we were helped immensely by the case managers housed in our building who allowed us access to their work computers when they were not at their desks. Though legally, this was completely against the rules, our SER, Jobs for Progress supervisor really wanted to see this project happen. She valued and understood the potential it offered and went the extra mile needed to let it happen. In addition to putting it on the line and letting students use computers, she also went the extra mile and printed out the whole webpage on her color printer at home (some 37 pages at the time) and shared this with her organization. SER administrators were very impressed and actually visited the class to congratulate them on their achievements. More than any email students received on the project, this personal contact really made an impression on the students.

Appendix 1

Name_____

Student Questionnaire:

1. What is the Internet?

2. How do you get to the Internet?

3. What can you find on the Internet?

4. What do you know about the Internet?

5. Where did you learn it?

6. Have you ever used the Internet?

7. What would you like to show someone on the Internet?

8. How could the Internet affect your life?

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