

Using the Authentic Intellectual (AIW) Framework to Connect First Year Students with the Local Blues Society

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The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how I used the Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW) pedagogical framework in conjunction with Project-Based Learning (PBL) to develop a campus-community partnership while enhancing and promoting the goals of the local blues society. In order to achieve the goals of the AIW framework, I created a major class project which charged the students with writing and editing a book telling stories of members of the local blues society to be available on Amazon.com. The results, or outcomes, of this project were categorized relative to two areas: academic (classroom) and civic (The Blues Society). The narratives and stories in the final version of the book varied significantly, but each, in their own way, contributed to a process where my students were able to think about civic engagement and community partnerships in an advanced and engaging way.

Community engagement projects, as a part of a university course or assignment, can sometimes be regarded as somewhat contrived exercises necessary to pass a class or earn a grade. To counter that notion, my goal in a recent class I taught, was to create coursework that had value beyond the classroom and added value to an existing local community group. Further I wanted to facilitate an opportunity for first-year students to become engaged in the community, meet members of a local blues preservation community group, and do scholarship around why preserving this form of music is important from a socio-historical and cultural perspective. The pedagogical structures of Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW) and Project-Based Learning (PBL) provided a framework and theoretical base on which I could design the course in way to meet the goals I had in mind.

The purpose of this article is to demonstrate how I used the Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW) pedagogical framework in conjunction with Project-Based Learning (PBL) to develop a campus-community partnership while enhancing and promoting the goals of the local blues society. AIW is defined as the (1) student construction of knowledge, (2) through disciplined inquiry, and (3) has value beyond the classroom (Newman, King, & Carmichael, 2007). In order to achieve the goals of the AIW framework, I created a major class project which charged the students with the writing and editing of a book telling stories of members of the local blues society to be available on Amazon.com. Refinements in the self-publishing book industry provide the opportunity to present student work in a way that has value outside of the classroom. In doing this, my hope was that the students' work would not only contribute to a local community group to fulfill its mission and vision, but also allow the students the opportunity understand the importance of civic engagement while doing a project that had implications to a larger audience and in the meantime energizing their learning.

The goal of the class project was to collaborate with the Central Iowa Blues Society to assist with their overall general objective to 'keep the blues alive'. One strategy to "keep the blues alive" is to form connections with young persons to help them understand the significance of this genre. To that end, I partnered the university freshman in my class with local blues society members (a generation older). The main project, a book, was written by my students and featured profiles of members/musicians

of the local society. The goals of the class/project were to: 1) highlight the actors involved with the local chapter 2) tell stories that promote the organization's mission/goals 3) help students understand civic engagement and what it means to be a part of a local society 4) help students construct their own answer to the question "what is the blues" and 5) meet the course's academic objectives: writing, critical thinking, and information literacy.

AUTHENTIC INTELLECTUAL WORK (AIW)

The Authentic Intellectual Work (AIW) framework (King, Newmann, & Carmichael, 2009; Newmann, Marks, & Gamoran, 1996; Newmann, Bryk, & Nagaoka, 2001; Newmann, King, & Carmichael, 2007) provided a model of instructional planning that helped rationalize a connection to an off-campus community group. The framework for authentic intellectual work is shorthand for distinguishing between the more complex accomplishments of skilled adults and the usual work students do in school (Carmichael & Martens, 2012). A lesson guided by AIW has several key components including: (1) student construction of knowledge, (2) disciplined inquiry, and (3) value beyond school (Newman, King, & Carmichael, 2007). Authentic Intellectual Work helps to move a lesson forward by moving away from the rote memorization and passive reception of information to a much more engaging lesson for learners involving deeper contextual issues (Scheuerell, 2011). Rather than just routine application of facts and procedures, AIW involves original application of knowledge and skills. It also entails careful study of a particular topic or problem and results in a product or presentation that has meaning beyond success in school (Carmichael & Martens, 2012). Students begin to make meaning by constructing their own knowledge around an idea or question (Carmichael & Martens, 2012).

AIW provides a framework for teaching and assessing goals within academic disciplines which require applied knowledge. Proponents of AIW would argue the use of this framework: 1) better prepares students for workplace, citizenship, and personal affairs; 2) increases student engagement; and 3) strengthens professional community (King, Newmann, & Carmichael, 2009). Providing opportunities for students to communicate ideas which have an impact on others provides significance beyond typical schoolwork.

Authentic Intellectual Work has empirical data that show positive achievement data in K-12 schools. Using data gathered from its statewide assessment, Iowa's Department of Education examined the performance of students in grades 3 through 11 in schools in which all teachers engaged in AIW as their primary professional development for at least year before administering the test. Carmichael and Martens (2012) report that those data were compared to data from an equal number of schools that were as closely matched as possible based on enrollment, race, socioeconomic status, English language learners, and disability. Comparisons in nine grades and four subjects for each — 36 comparisons — demonstrate that students in schools implementing AIW scored significantly higher in 26 comparisons, with higher percentages of students proficient in 32 comparisons (Carmichael & Martens, 2012). The data, although preliminary, show promise in K-12 education and we wanted to begin using this model to gauge its utility for working in higher education and with community service work.

Other research has shown that students who experience higher levels of authentic assessment and instruction showed higher achievement than those who experiences lower levels of instruction (King, Newmann, & Charmichael, 2009). The Wisconsin Center for Education Research, the University of Minnesota, and the Consortium on Chicago School Research demonstrated students grades 3 through 12 who received higher levels of authentic instruction achieved at higher levels than peers who received lower levels of authentic instruction. These results spanned across different subject areas and for different students irrespective of race, gender, disability, or SES status.

While some research exists on student achievement results and classroom practices on Authentic Intellectual Work, most of the work focuses on K-12 students. Using Authentic Intellectual Framework in higher education classrooms does not appear often in the literature. This article seeks to explain the process of using the Authentic Intellectual Work framework, along with Project-Based Learning, in a way that contributes to the growth of both civic engagement and engaged public scholarship.

PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

Project-based learning (PBL) is succinctly defined as “a model that organizes learning around projects” (Thomas, 2000, p. 1). In project-based learning, students work in groups to solve challenging problems that are authentic, curriculum-based, and often interdisciplinary (Solomon, 2003). Research on project-based learning spans subject areas from math and science (Holmes & Hwang, 2016; Hugerat, 2016; Sanft & Ziegler-Graham, 2017) to engaging English Language Learners (Campbell, 2012) and various disciplines in higher education (Kai Wah Chu, Zhang, Chan, Wing Yi Lee, Zou, & Lau, 2017). Project-based learning is not always embraced by educators as the role of the instructor differs from traditional education models. In a survey study of in-service teachers' perceptions of project-based learning, Habok and Nagy (2016) demonstrated that teachers at the secondary level had a preference for frontal work, individual work, and demonstration. This is different from the role the instructor plays in project-based learning, where the instructor must facilitate, allow students to be a part of the decision-making process, assign roles and activities, make sure tools are necessary, and ensure students are able to work cooperatively in groups.

Project-based learning offers an engaging instructional method to make learners active constructors of knowledge and thus can be nested within the AIW model. The use of projects in classrooms is not a new phenomenon, but Thomas (2000) outlined some distinguishing characteristics that define the pedagogy known as project-based learning. Thomas (2000) says project-based learning projects are central, not peripheral, to the curriculum and are focused on questions or problems that “drive” students to encounter the central concepts and principles of a discipline. Further, the largely student-driven projects involve the students in a constructive investigation that produces an outcome that is realistic, not school-like. With the students responsible for constructing ways to approach the problem at hand, the role of the teacher is inherently different than it is with traditional pedagogies. The instructors tend to work ‘backstage’ as the learners work on the project (Gulbahar & Tinmaz, 2006). Because various students may be researching various topics, the role of the teacher must be fluid, flexible, and dynamic. Solomon (2003) says that the teacher's role is to guide and advise, rather than to direct and manage, student work. But this does not mean the instructor sits back and lets the project happen. Assessment is ongoing and instructors must make sure students receive feedback throughout the process (Habok & Nagy, 2016). As demonstrated later in this article, the teacher must be an active advisor, making suggestions that sometimes deal with content and sometimes deal with process.

One of the components of project-based learning is student creation of a public product. Students might explain, display, or present their work beyond the classroom (Buck Institute for Education, 2018). Similar to the component of AIW in which students are provided opportunities to communicate ideas which have an impact on others (King, Newmann, & Carmichael, 2009), creating a public product affords students deeper learning, a sense of purpose, and engagement with 21st century workplace skills. Not only are these components motivating, but they also provide students opportunities to engage in deep learning that honors and develops the intellectual rigor of students.

PASSION IN ACTION: THE CONTEXT OF THE CENTRAL IOWA BLUES SOCIETY

The Central Iowa Blues Society (CIBS) was created in 1992 to accommodate and preserve the blues genre in the region. CIBS is a 501(c)3, non-profit organization whose primary goals is, broadly, to “keep the blues alive”. Additional goals cited on their website include: to increase awareness of and appreciation for the blues and to provide a network of association for the area blues lovers. Activities that help the organization meet their goals include curating the Iowa Blues Hall of Fame, hosting the Iowa Blues Challenge, sponsoring the Blues in the Schools program, and a presenting a number of local, regional, a national blues acts in concert. The society has seen growth in recent years due presumably to the activity of the board of directors and member-leaders. Further by supporting and educating future generations of the socio-historic and cultural importance of the blues, CIBS is helping the keep the blues alive with the amongst the local and regional community.

Positionality: Why the blues?

As an associate professor of education, my primary responsibility for teaching is in education leadership (graduate school),

the preparation of school and building administrators and principals. But for the past four fall semesters, I have volunteered to teach one course in the FYS (First Year Seminar) program. These courses are for first-year students, most often freshman, and serve as an extension to the pre-semester orientation program. The academic goals of the classes in this program are to assist the learner in developing in three areas: writing, critical thinking and information literacy. The FYS program gives flexibility to the instructors to use any content area they wish to teach those three areas. Other FYS course topics included: Star Wars, politics, Harry Potter, horror movies, the Beatles, and other pop culture, novelty high-interest themes. For me, a blues musician, I saw this as an opportunity to merge my work at the university and my passion for the blues.

In creating the class, I assumed most 18 or 19 year-old students were not huge fans of the blues genre. Further, I was not certain that the students could learn about the blues from a textbook and YouTube videos alone. I knew that the local blues society was a passionate and active community group. Although I am a member, I rarely attend meetings. However, anytime I would attend an event sponsored by the group, I found a warm and welcoming environment. Thus, I thought this group would be assistive in bridging my students on campus to an off-campus community of passionate folks to accomplish multiple goals of the course.

Writing the book:

The context of the students and the course

Although it is course designed to facilitate writing and critical thinking, I use the Blues as a way to traverse these skills which are critical for success at the university. The class tracks the evolution of the genre as it was born in the slavery field of the South and became a social and cultural piece of the sharecropping era in the Delta region. We also explore why the blues moved to Chicago, Memphis, St. Louis and how it changed as a result.

But in an attempt to create deep experiential opportunities for the students in the class I complimented the traditional classroom pedagogical components with projects/assignments outside of the classroom. For example, after securing permission from both the university and venue, I required that students attend 2 blues shows at an establishment near the university. I was present for all the shows to supervise and mediate the 18/19 years olds in a bar. I also invited some of the best blues players in the city to come into class to talk about influences, songwriting, blues styles, performance and more. Also, as a team building activity, I was able to reserve an hour of studio time in a local recording studio and we “laid down a track”, where everyone participated in one way or another on various instruments. Most, but not all, students were musicians to some extent. Those who were not musicians contributed in the production room or as background vocalists. But the major project of the class, seeing that it was a class designed to enhance writing and critical thinking, was for the students in my class to meet and learn from real, passionate local blues fans with the outcome being a chapter in a class book that would be available for purchase on Amazon.com.

From a teaching standpoint, I believe that if students can create a project that has value *outside of the classroom* it will, more times than not, be of higher quality than projects created solely for just the instructor. The essence of the project was to connect my students with a local blues fan and learn from their experi-

ence and insights regarding what it meant to be a part of civic community group. I attended the September 2017 CIBS meeting and shared my vision for this class project to the members. I asked the members, blues fans, to volunteer to be a part of the project. The membership of the CIBS was supportive of this idea. By the end of the meeting I had nearly all the volunteers I needed. The majority of the volunteers were not musicians as we were trying to understand the perspective of a fan’s relationship to the performer and venue.

I have known the local blues community to be a hospitable family of fans who are passionate about the scene. I told my students this prior to the interview process. Still, they were a bit surprised by what this actually looked like in practice. The people we profiled in the book were wonderful and treated my students with respect, patience, and warmth. The folks they interviewed were the perfect hosts at the open doorway to the local blues community.

The goal of this project-based learning/authentic intellectual work activity was to write and edit a book featuring and profiling local members/fans of the Central Iowa Blues Society. Refinements in the self-publishing industry provided an opportunity to present student work to a larger audience, rather than just the bounds of the class, in an engaging format (Author, & Kruse, 2015). At the onset of the class, I facilitated a process where the 23 students elected members in the class for these two leadership committees: three lead editors and three members to lead the peer-review team. I worked with these leaders as they made a number of final decisions on matters ranging from editing/revision to book layout, cover design and chapter sequence. Following the precepts of project-based learning and AIW, my goal was for this to be, largely, a student-driven project where they constructed the knowledge that produced an outcome that had relevance in the world outside the classroom. Members of these leadership teams were also responsible for interviewing and writing a chapter.

Prior to the conducting the interviews, in class we talked about how to conduct these interviews from the lens of general qualitative methods framework and visited about ethics of the project. Although the project did not require IRB approval, we created a consent-like process indicating, among other things, that volunteers would be able to view, modify, and approve their chapter prior to its publication. As a class, we brainstormed and refined, a list of common questions to ask in the semi-structured interviews. These questions were centered around biographical information, why they loved the blues, who were their favorite artists and venues, how was their passion developed and what factors contributed to that passion for the music. After the students conducted the interview, we worked in project teams, led by the student-elected editors and peer-review team, to transform the interview transcripts into book chapters. Each peer-review leader was in charge of a group of about 5-6 students who were writing chapters. This is the process by which the students were able to meet the writing and critical thinking outcomes of the course. The project spanned the entirety of the semester and, in the end, book featured chapters on 20 different fans.

Moreover, the interviewing and writing had a tremendous impact on my students as they wrestled with how to make sense of this music genre called the Blues. In the AIW framework this is where the students begin to make meaning by constructing their own knowledge around an idea or question through in-depth inquiry. Additionally, this process allowed my students to gain

insight as to how the participants became fans of the blues and why this genre is important to them.

In order to receive an A for the class and for the chapter to be included in the final version of the published book, the student's chapter must be graded as "proficient" or "meets the standard." The expectations for success on the project was clearly defined in a rubric modified from a graduate level writing assessment and included: develops ideas cogently, organizes them logically and connects them with clear transitions, demonstrates control of language, including appropriate word choice and sentence variety and clearly identifies important features of the subject and analyzes them insightfully.

Students on the two leadership teams made it a goal that everyone's chapter be included in the final version. Thus, I worked with them to create a peer-review and editing process to assist writers in developing their chapter into a book-worthy chapter. This was done in the form of whole class writing workshops, small group writing round tables, peer feedback, leadership team feedback, and instructor feedback. The peer-review team facilitated formative feedback opportunities at four different points in the drafting process.

PROJECT RESULTS

The AIW methodology, combined with project-based learning, provided an instructional framework that allowed me to accomplish the academic goals of the course (writing, problem solving) while providing a meaningful and a purposeful civic engagement opportunity and enhancing a community partnership. Further this project, an intense writing project that was to be made available for a wider audience outside the classroom, honored and developed the intellectual capacities of these students and in many ways contributed to the skills necessary for civic engagement and scholarship. The results, or outcomes, of this project can be categorized relative to two areas: academic (classroom) and civic (Central Iowa Blues Society)

From the academic perspective, by the end of the course and with the help of a peer-revision process, all students' chapters were assessed as proficient and thus included in the final versions of the book. Feedback from the end-of-course evaluation seemed to indicate the key academic objectives were met. Seventeen of the twenty-one students completed the evaluation. Here is a summative excerpt written by one of the FYS program directors taken from the evaluations relative to the academic areas:

Your evaluations were outstanding. The students felt that they learned a lot. 82% said they improved their writing skills (significantly higher than the FYS average), with all the rest neutral on that issue. Similarly, on questions related to critical thinking skills, almost all were either positive or neutral. Very few thought they did not improve these skills.

When thinking about the civic component of the course, it was interesting to note that when answering question #22 on the end-of-the-course evaluation (did your FYS have a service-learning component that was a structured part of the course?) eleven of the seventeen answered "no". Apparently, several students in the class did not perceive the book/interview project with CIBS as a service learning project. However, of the 6 students who said "yes" to question #22, all of them responded on question #23 (how would you rate the service learning component in your FYS) that the service learning project was either positive or very

positive. The best explanation for this, perhaps, is the fact that I rarely used the term "service learning." More frequently I simply used the language, "the book project" or "connecting with CIBS." I wanted to routinize the civic engagement piece as an integrated part of the course, not just a once or twice occurring event where students did something off campus. Perhaps the evaluation question was confusing due to this shift in language on my part. Regardless, many of the students did not seem to regard the book project as "service learning."

There were several barriers/challenges worth noting. First of all, I wanted to ensure the safety of the students. Although I personally knew most of the blues fans who volunteered for the project, I needed to vet a few to make sure they would engage in a safe and productive interview. I also did some behind-the-scenes work with each volunteer in the project to make sure they understood the parameters of the project (example: working with 18/19 year-olds' worldview). Another challenge was coaching the students to set-up and show up on time at the interview prepared for the task at hand. Finally, I had to mediate the finalizing of several finished chapter. For example, one participant wanted to completely re-write his chapter to emphasize various other content. In a conversation, I reiterated finding a balance between his wishes while keeping the integrity of the project which sought the students' interpretation.

There were several big ideas or themes that resulted from an analysis of the final chapters. As the instructor I was hopeful that student outcomes, via themes or big ideas presented in their final chapter, would be relevant to CIBS's purpose and goals. One way to measure the effectiveness of this project was to check for alignment between themes in the final writing project and goals of CIBS.

Theme #1: The Blues are not dying

Music historian Robert Santelli, executive director of the Grammy Museum and author of *The Best of the Blues: The 101 Essential Blues Albums* and *The Big Book of Blues: A Biographical Encyclopedia* recently said, "Blues music is a dying form. We're in danger of the blues becoming a historical form like Dixieland or big band." As stated previously, one of the goals of CIBS is to preserve, cultivate and support the blues...or in the language of blues fans, "keep the blues alive." Students came away from this project feeling that there was hope to keep the blues alive...mainly because of the passion and knowledge of the blues fans they met and interviewed. One student concluded, "the blues aren't dying, they are just resting" and another said that "blues music is the tree and other genres are fruits that grow from it." Another student said, "blues will continue to exist, but it will evolve the same way it has evolved from the old (delta) blues." A great majority of the chapters addressed this issue and students seemed convinced that the blues are not dying.

Theme #2: Members of CIBS were hospitable...like a family.

Another theme that surfaced throughout the finished book regarded the warm and hospitable nature of the CIBS members. One student wrote that the CIBS member she interviewed, Alice, talked about going to events and venues with her friends and explained, "we always take in strangers and make them feel welcome and make sure they are having a good time." Another student wrote:

I have learned just how tightly knit the blues society is here; I could even say that they are a family of blues fans. During my interview with Ron, a woman sitting near us overheard what we were discussing during our interview and gave him a nudge. When he looked to see who had nudged him, he instantly recognized who it was and introduced me to Shannon Dario, wife of Iowa Blues Hall of Fame drummer Dwight Dario. He introduced Mrs. Dario to me and they had a brief conversation and exchanged a few laughs together. Just from this small interaction between two fans of the blues, I can see how closely knit this blues community is here in Des Moines.

These and other narratives highlights elements of a strong network of passionate blues fans (CIBS purpose/goal #4) associated with this local community group and their willingness to connect with others, included college-aged students. I'm pleased that my students were privy to seeing how a successful and highly functional community group works.

CONCLUSION

In a conversation with one of the directors of CIBS after the completion of the project, Della indicated that the book project was in alignment with the organization's mission. She said, "Any time you have the opportunity to share information and stories you are creating an awareness. Perhaps something I said to Marianne (student in the course) made her interested in listening to a different record or looking up something different on youtube."

Authentic Intellectual Work and Project-Based Learning provided a pedagogical framework for me to connect my course, and corresponding assignments, to the work of a local non-profit community organization. Students in the class met with society members at coffee houses and music venues and wrestled with the role CIBS and their members played in keeping the blues alive (student construction of knowledge). Through face-to-face interviews, a rigorous peer-review process, and other relevant course content (in-depth inquiry) they were able to write a book (has value outside the classroom) featuring members of the organization. The narratives and stories in the final version of the book varied significantly, but each, in their own way, contributed to a process where my students were able to think about civic engagement and community partnerships in an advanced and engaging way.

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