

Reflection – Practicum Experience 2004-2005
Lisa Radden

I completed my high school practicum experience at TechBoston Academy in Dorchester, Massachusetts at the Dorchester Education Complex during the first semester of the 2004-2005 academic year. I had already been teaching there for two years, and so was comfortable in the community, knew the staff and students well as they did me, and I ran my own classroom. Although I taught independently with fairly little intervention from colleagues, I know I still grew and improved a great deal in supporting and integrating technology into the high school curriculum.

I experimented this year with using an online community with my advanced web students. Students were introduced to the TappedIN space (<http://tappedin.org/tappedin/>), in which I posted assignments for students to download, and discussion threads for students to post comments to. I found it very rewarding. Students were engaged in the virtual space. They were able to post their reflections on class work and read each other's comments, as well as get immediate feedback from me. I think it was satisfying for them to have their work responded to by peers as well as myself in such an open forum. I shared my experience with colleagues, and as a result will be training teachers during the summer orientation on how to use the space in their own classrooms.

I also addressed the topic of good and bad design principles far more successfully this year than in years past. I felt the activities and discussions were valuable. In years past I made a rubric to evaluate web sites that was far too technical and confusing for students and teachers alike. This year I had the students participate in the forming of a web site rubric we could all understand and agree upon. I was pleased to see the rubric aligned with the International Academy of Digital Arts and Sciences' evaluation criteria for the Webby Awards (<http://www.webbyawards.com/webbys/criteria.php>). The rubric was also introduced to my colleagues, and has been used by other teachers as the rubric to evaluate web projects in their own classrooms.

Additionally, I feel my classroom management has greatly improved. I can remember my first year teaching and how I had trouble relating to the students and they to me. I was teaching part time so I was not accessible or approachable. My lessons were too dense with information and not structured for success. The pace was far too overwhelming and I assumed they had knowledge of things that I should not have breezed over. Now, I know the value of posting clearly an agenda for the day, of taking attendance carefully, of keeping my lectures to a minimum and maximizing the hands-on activities and discussions, of really listening to the students and conforming to their needs, of incorporating my personality and sense of humor into the lessons, of being fair but not too easy, of being accountable about grades even when the students are not, of demanding high standards and sticking to those standards despite failures, of being flexible but not a pushover, of getting OUT of the classroom and seeking advice and sharing best practices with my colleagues, and of trying new approaches with confidence as well as the acceptance of my mistakes.

One challenge in particular that I struggled with this year was establishing my classroom within the larger school community. Too often my class was interrupted by either the addition of new students, the dropping of students, or changes in the schedule. It was difficult to keep track of who was enrolled and the students took advantage of the

confusion or responded to the distractions negatively. I know I need to do a better job of closing my class to these disturbances. I understand that establishing the delicate balance of an engaging, fun, mutually respectful, challenging, and inclusive classroom environment is a daily challenge.

I completed my middle school practicum experience at the Driscoll School in Brookline during the second semester of the 2004-2005 academic year. In this situation, I came in as an outsider into a well-established learning community, an assistant to a classroom teacher, and as a novice to apple computers. I have taught middle school children many times before, and in labs, and have used macs sporadically, so I was not intimidated. However, I did find it difficult to come in as an assistant and as a stranger – to the children I was a second best resource to their teacher, and unapproachable as a person. It took a great deal of time for them to learn to seek me and trust me with their questions once I took the lead on a project. I was also apprehensive at first about being too invasive or too pushy. At TechBoston Academy, I have to constantly remind, reprimand, and review in order to get the majority of students to do the work. At the Driscoll School, the majority of students are self-directed and are capable of solving problems on their own. Students are eager to do more than what is asked of them, come into the lab during free time to work, and grades are not the dominant motivating factor. A genuine love of learning and a love of technology are apparent among the student body.

Summary – what are the differences between the two schools? How are they similar? Who has the “advantage”? Which does a “better job” of integrating technology? How are the kids similar? How are they different?