

**Abstract of Online Literature Circles Project:
UWSP/Public School Collaboration, 2006-07
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This project involved a collaboration among faculty and students at UWSP, Adams Friendship High School, and Milwaukee Vincent High School. I planned the project with two of my former UWSP English Education students, Erica Ringelspaugh and Anthony Wacker, who now teach at these two schools. The plan was for students from my English 381, Reading for the English Teacher, class to work in pairs leading online literature discussion groups. With UPDC grant funding, I purchased sets of five different novels by African American writers. Two groups from each school read each novel. My partnered reading students posted discussion prompts each week during the six-week reading period. The two high school teachers and I suggested revisions to their prompts, and then they posted the revised prompts for their small groups, to which students in their small groups responded.

With the Adams Friendship students, the plan worked out as intended. This group of students was permitted to participate fully in the project, and so they were able to read the online prompts, respond online, and read the responses of their peers as well as those of their college-student leaders. However, Milwaukee Public Schools denied the technology dimension of the project from concern about student safety, and so the Milwaukee students were able to respond only by U.S. mail. It took several weeks to work out this alternative approach, and, as a consequence, the students' written responses arrived only twice. Thus the Milwaukee students lost the opportunity to join in the online discussion with peers and college students. It was evident that the students who had full access were both more motivated to participate and entered more fully into thinking about and discussing their books.

The ending event for the project was a field trip for the high school students to visit UWSP for a Friday at the end of March. The UWSP students planned the day, from opening ice breaker activities, through a Power Point advance tour of the cafeteria, through sessions with their book groups in which students from both schools presented the projects which they had done (as assigned by the UWSP student leaders) in response to the books they'd read, and ending in a session of deep sharing of students' lives and concerns. The field trip was a resounding success. At the end of the day,

students from both schools wrote about their new sense that students from the opposite race (because all of the Milwaukee students were African American, and all of the Adams Friendship students were white) were good people with similar needs and concerns. Students wrote perceptively about the things they'd learned from reading and discussing their novels. And a large number of students (especially the Milwaukee students) wrote that for the first time, they thought they would like to attend college.

My planned focus for this research project was on my own students' learning, as discerned through a series of reflections they made in online postings for our class. I have reread these postings and reflected on them, and I see them as unanimously positive as well. The UWSP pre-service teachers had a rich experience (two of the twenty said it was the single most powerful learning experience they'd ever had). They learned about teaching reading, about leading discussion, about writing for a student audience, about designing effective projects and rubrics, and about working with students of diverse backgrounds. The majority of these students said that this authentic teaching experience had assured them that they have chosen the right direction for their lives.