

Nate Piper, Roxbury Latin, Boston, USA
Reflection on the Action Research Journey

This past year has been an incredible learning experience in many ways. The action research project that I took on was both challenging and fulfilling, and greatly enriched my work with the boys at Roxbury Latin. Too much of my time in my relatively few years of teaching has been spent trying to get up to speed and scramble to remain afloat, and it has been difficult to set aside time for intentional, intensive reflection - there are always many more immediate demands on my time and attention. Through this project, I have not only come to learn more about myself, my teaching, and the boys I teach, but I have also come to understand and appreciate how critical it is - in this profession and in this life - to set aside time, even sacred time, for analysis, reflection, and redirection.

The prospect of the project was daunting at first, particularly before the theme of my research came into clearer focus. I was in the midst of the conceptual stage of curriculum design for a new hands-on, integrated STEAM course, and as such, my mind was occupied by the 'big ideas' of the maker movement. It took substantial effort to narrow that focus down to a feasible project. Margot was particularly helpful during this stage, with her gentle but firm guidance, deeply rooted in her expansive experience with action research projects. She knows what she's talking about.

As my project took shape, and the boys returned to school, and the initial deadlines started to move closer, I was reminded that assignments and deadlines are no more fun now than they were when I was on the other side of the desk. However, as teachers we know as well as anyone that there is a master plan behind the syllabus, and keeping current with the work is critical to ongoing success. While there were moments when I felt as though I didn't have time to set aside, I learned (again) that there will always be time for whatever is prioritized. Through the course of my 'action', it wasn't always clear whether or not the boys were responding, learning what I hoped they were, or building any lasting habits. There were certainly high points, when everything worked just right and I could see sparks of creativity igniting in the eyes of all of the boys, but on other days it seemed like they desired nothing more than a repetitive, concrete assignment that didn't require an ounce of individuality.

The most rewarding phase of my project was the data collection phase, and particularly, the interviews with the boys. I was so impressed by their candor, honesty, general cheerfulness, and cooperativeness. I was also pleased to hear that were actually gleaned something meaningful from the projects. The simple 'data collection' step for me turned into a mutually beneficial exercise as well, because it asked the boys to be thoughtful and introspective about their work in a way that they may not have been otherwise.

The school year has recently come to a close, and this chapter of my ongoing development as a teacher of boys closes along with it. I'm very nearly exhausted, but don't for a moment regret having taken on this action research project. I'm looking forward to summertime rest and rejuvenation, but I am also looking forward to the Fall, and to building on the lessons and strategies I have developed through this program. A million thanks to Margot, Di, and the IBSC, and to my Roxbury Latin and IBSC action research colleagues for all of their support, shared wisdom, and camaraderie.