Student Learning Objective Number One

Reflective Practice

During the fall of 2007, I took a class titled SED 695B, advanced laboratory curriculum development with Dr. Herr. During this class I completed a fieldwork assignment where I explored, documented and developed a study guide to a field trip location that my students could go to. I chose to go to the newly remodeled Griffith Observatory because of its direct connection to the astronomy curriculum that my 8th graders must learn. After personally exploring the site, I uploaded my photos, the study guide I developed while there and other reference materials onto the website created for our Master’s portfolio.

Astronomy usually comes at the end of the school-year for me. I teach it last because I find that this is the portion of the 8th grade curriculum that students have greatest interest in and thus enjoy the most. Because my degree is in biology, I have had to learn a great deal of astronomy and improve my content knowledge throughout the years. I have never taken any sort of astronomy course in college. When I chose to complete my fieldwork assignment at the Griffith Observatory, I did so as much for my students as for me. I wanted to deepen my content knowledge by examining the modern instruments used in the field of Astronomy.

While at the Griffith Observatory, I had the opportunity to speak to the many knowledgeable guides who were actually graduate students from nearby universities. They were very informative and represent access to an expert in the area of astronomy for me.
and my students. When designing the worksheet for the field trip, I made sure to include questions that could only be answered by speaking with the guides.

Constructing the worksheet, or the guide, for the field trip allowed me to expand and practice the pedagogical skill of planning and carrying out a field trip. Field trips are recognized as an important pedagogical skill in a teacher’s arsenal. However, I did not have a lot of experience in planning and taking my students on a field trip. This assignment allowed me to envision the educational outcome of my trip ahead of time. It also allowed me to thoroughly explore the location in order to add as much depth to the students’ experience as possible. I knew that I didn’t want the trip to be defined by the worksheet, but I also wanted all students to take part in the trip. I made sure to construct questions that would engage all or most students and thus leave little room for idle hands. The written guide also addresses the many learning modalities that my students possess. The assignment reflects my awareness that students should have the opportunity for diverse expression such as writing, drawing, speaking, watching, interacting, etc.

As an educator, I am often encouraged to take my students on field trips. As a science teacher I know that if students have the opportunity to learn by doing, they can grasp and remember scientific concepts at a greater rate. This assignment presented to me an occasion for the first time to explore a field trip location as a teacher as well as a student prior to taking my own students. As a teacher, I now truly grasp the amount of planning it takes to engage your students in a worthwhile and educational field trip. As a Masters candidate, I feel empowered to share what I’ve learned about planning field trips with my fellow colleagues. The fact that the assignment was documented by pictures and that all the
information regarding the trip is on the internet gives me a unique opportunity to communicate my work to fellow teachers.

I look forward to using my summer vacation to explore other field trip locations, constructing additional guides and sharing this information with teachers around me. The Masters cohort has added to my confidence and ability to play a leadership role in an area that I was not so confident in before. I know that field trips without goals, planning, accountability, direct applicability to the students’ interests and connections to class content standards will yield little reward.