3. SLO: RESEARCH SKILLS

Class: SED 697  
Professor: Dr. Michael Rivas  
Assignment: Action Research Project

The process of learning how to design and conduct an Action Research Project took place in SED 600. Andrew Johnson’s A Short Guide to Action Research became our bible. Dr. Rivas had us read the various sections with a special emphasis on “Chapter 15: Action Research as Master’s Thesis.” With this book as a guide we developed our proposals which we submitted by the end of the Spring 2007 semester; and our proposals were then reviewed by the professors of the Science Education Masters cohort. During the Summer of 2007 I began to write my literature review as suggested by Dr. Rivas. I quickly discovered that there was very little research that had been done in the area that I had chosen to research. I meet with Dr. Rivas at the end of August, 2007 to discuss and fine tune my Action Research Project. Dr. Rivas reassured me that the lack of research on my topic was not necessarily a problem, but that I could supplement my literature review with information pertaining to related topics and my own personal experiences in the classroom that were relevant to my Action Research Project. Without SED 600 and the personal guidance of Dr. Rivas there is no way my Action Research Project would have gotten off the ground.

I conducted my Action Research Project during the Fall, 2007 semester. During the Winter Break I completed a rough draft of my Literature Review and began the
process of analyzing my data. An integral part of SED 697 was peer editing. My peers not only found grammatical errors, they showed me areas that I had thought I had adequately explained but I had not. Their assistance was invaluable in writing the Action Research Project thesis. In addition to peer review, we developed presentation in which we discussed the various sections of our Research to our fellow students. The process of explaining complex ideas, detailed data, and nuanced conclusions in a handful of Powerpoint slides was challenging.

In conclusion, I have to say that I felt “shepherded” during my “walk in the valley of the shadow of death” which was my Action Research Project. It is just as well that I didn’t know what I was getting into! Dr. Rivas gave us just enough warning to keep us on task while not freaking us out to the point of paralysis. In spite of the fact that I have been a science teacher for over twenty years, the process of conducting Action Research was completely new to me. I have learned enormously as a result of this process. I was also allowed to pursue a topic that I was personally passionate about even though it was perhaps a bit out of the ordinary: Teaching Science in the Context of Classical Aesthetics.

Has this experience changed my teaching? Yes. I certainly have a much better understanding of what education researchers go through when they do research. I doubt if I will treat their studies as dismissively as I have done in the past although I believe I am more capable of examining their studies more critically. And in the process of conducting my Action Research Project I had the opportunity to introduce students to aesthetics in science—that is, the Beauty of Nature. In the brief time I taught science in the context of classical aesthetics I know that I changed the perspective of some students
regarding the Nature of Science and the nature of Nature. I know this because the results of my Action Research Project indicated that I had! That has made the experience even more rewarding.