

## Reflections on Learning I: Saving the Wetlands Project Reflection

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**Course:** MAT 640

**Instructor:** Dr. Cynthia Elliott

**Assignment:** Service-Learning

### *Description*

In order to increase awareness and educate others about the critical issue of saving Louisiana's wetlands, I chose to perform a Service-Learning project with one of my fourth grade classes at Parkview Baptist School. The main objective was to teach the students about the wetlands by tying it in with a French lesson on the settlement of the Acadians in south Louisiana. Before I could teach the students about the wetlands, I had to learn more about them myself. To achieve this, I read articles from the Internet and watched a detailed video on the history of the area and the issues surrounding the wetlands. I started the lesson by giving the students a pre-assessment, in which they were asked to write what they knew about the wetlands. After the lesson, I gave a post-assessment to determine what new knowledge they gained. The students viewed a wetlands video produced by the Barataria-Terrebonne National Estuary Program, called *Haunted Water, Fragile Lands: Oh, What Tales to Tell*. As the students watched the film, they answered questions about key points in the presented information. After several days, we finished the video and reviewed the questions and answers. The students were curious about parts of the video, so we also spent that class period discussing various ideas presented in the video. I then incorporated technology into the lesson by using Internet sites and a projector. I showed the students pictures and articles about the wetlands in south Louisiana, from the National Geographic and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency websites. In addition to discussing where and why there are wetlands, we also addressed the potential loss of wetlands

over the next fifty years and methods of protecting them. After the information was presented, I collaborated with the art teacher at Parkview, Mrs. Marline Price, to design a hands-on eco-art project for the students to make. We divided the students into groups, giving each a specific project. The first group made the trees; the second created the alligator; another designed the marsh; and the last group made the boat. After the project was complete, I labeled the front portion of the project with general information about why and how the project was made; I then had each student write one fact about the wetlands on a small piece of paper to go around the sides of the project. This way, the project was informative as well as artistically representative. The project is currently being displayed at the school library, and, after Christmas, I plan to display it at the Jones Creek Regional Branch Library.

### *Analysis*

I decided to do this Service-Learning project with one of my French classes because I could easily tie it in with a lesson on the Acadian settlement in south Louisiana. Also, I felt that relating history to current issues broadened the students' understanding and deepened their overall knowledge. By overlapping the course contents of French, history, art, and science, I encouraged the students to use metacognitive thinking to increase their existing schema and real life situations. This strategy worked because they knew relatively little about the wetlands, according to the pre-assessment, but learned a great deal through the course of the project, according to their responses to the post-assessment. For instance, they enjoyed the video and learned a lot through the question-answer discussion. I used the strategy of questions-response during the video to keep their attention on the information presented in the video; questions were designed to highlight the main points and help the students pick out the main ideas. I think this worked well because I could see them concentrating and focusing on the information, instead of

daydreaming, as they watched the video. After the film, we discussed the questions to ensure they had the correct information and to make the data more concrete in their minds. I used the computer to add technology to the lesson, as well as to provide a great visual element to their learning experience. I wanted to show them where to find information about the wetlands on the computer. The maps were also a wonderful way to bring in some geography. The use of technology increased their intrinsic motivation because they were very interested in seeing the pictures of a wetland situation in south Louisiana following the devastation of Hurricane Katrina. I also got quite a reaction from the students of the satellite image projecting Louisiana's wetland in about fifty years. The part they enjoyed the most, however, was the hands-on eco-art project. Mrs. Price and I chose natural materials to duplicate the wetlands, which the students used to create their art project. Not only did they learn to use art as a way of expressing themselves, but also saw its relevance to a topic that was being studied. I feel that this was an example of good pedagogical skills. First, my approach and sequence to the lesson helped the students by informing and teaching them ways to save the wetlands; it also added to their intrinsic motivation by adding depth to their current schema. This project relates to my own personal theory of constructivism because I believe that students learn best through hands-on activities. Projects like this make the information they are learning come to life. To share this project and information with others, I wanted to display the project in the school library. After discussing it with the librarian, Mrs. Leah Gautreau, I was excited to learn that she wanted to make an entire "wetlands" display with the project as the centerpiece. It would be surrounded with books on Louisiana and the wetlands. I was thrilled to find her so helpful, and I plan to bring the project to the Jones Creek Regional Branch Library, as well, so that the information may reach a larger

audience. I feel that the students benefited a great deal from the partnership that was formed by the art teacher, the librarian, and myself.

### ***Reflection***

This project taught me how to work with other teachers in a collaborative effort to achieve interrelated content learning activities, and I will use this experience for future lessons. I gained knowledge of the learner by working with Mrs. Price to adjust the difficulty level of the art project based on the ability level of the students, and I will use these pedagogical skills in future lessons. Mrs. Price helped me gain knowledge of the learner in the area of art by allowing me to work freely with the students and get a feel for their strengths and weaknesses in that area. I am excited about the possibility of using the elements I have learned from this lesson with other topics. My only regret is that I was rushed through the lesson. In future lessons, I will plan to have more discussion and group time. I believe that the students can learn a great deal from each other and can benefit from cooperative grouping. Also, due to time constraints, I did the research from the Internet and presented it to the students. In the future, I would prefer to have the students find the information themselves. I would take them to the library or computer lab and transfer that task directly to them. By doing their own research, students would obtain more positive affective aspects, gain more experience in learning the necessary skills of researching a topic, and be encouraged to use self-discipline. This strategy also would work well for teachers, because they could use it as way of adapting the instruction to individual needs.

## References

National Geographic. (2004, October). Retrieved Fall, 2006, from the World Wide Web: <http://magma.nationalgeographic.com>.

Pitre, G. (Writer/Producer/Director) (1997, May). *Haunted waters fragile lands: Oh, what tales to tell!* [Videorecording]. Thibodaux, LA: Cote Blanche Production in co-production with LA Public Broadcasting and WYES-TV/New Orleans for the Barataria- Terrebonne National Estuary Program.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (2006, February). *Wetlands*. Retrieved Fall, 2006, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.epa.gov/owow/wetlands/what/definitions.html>.

**Dr. Elliott's Comments:** *Teacher candidates are asked to write as accomplished teachers based on the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) where they describe, analyze, and reflect on the teaching-learning sequence.*