Innovative Practicum Experiences for Elementary Science in Collaboration with Community Partners

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Science, Math, & Technology Education

Practicum Model At-A-Glance

Science Methods • Science Practicum taken in consecutive quarters (10 weeks) with same instructor
24 students per course
Class meets 3 days/week (5 hours)

During the methods course, prospective teachers participate in a field trip with a community partner. They then collaborate on developing NGSS-aligned SE lessons for the classroom to complement the field trip experience.

Our community partner connects us with local participating classrooms in which the lessons will be piloted the following quarter’s practicum.

Prospective teachers implement the lessons in pairs, teaching 2 sessions/week depending on classroom teachers’ schedules. (Range of 8-16 hours of instructional time)

Prospective teachers gather feedback from students and teachers and analyze assessment data to make improvements to the lessons.

Prospective teachers present the finished curriculum to the community partners for final review and dissemination.

2018-2019 Forest School full-day field trip for 3rd Graders

WWU preservice teachers created a series of pre- and post-field trip lessons for use in the classroom. Students examine how different stakeholders define a ‘forest’ and how forest habitats support a diversity of life. They bring back what they learn about local forest species to consider how they are uniquely adapted to the forest environment.

Students presented the completed unit at the NSTA Area conference in Seattle. The lessons were being utilized by teachers throughout the region until Forest School was put on hiatus during the pandemic.

AFFORDANCES

• Expands science learning beyond the classroom setting
• Awareness of resources to support continued science learning
• Authentic engagement with curriculum materials and resources
• Authentic collaboration with/in grade level teams
• Awareness of the value of students’ feedback on instruction
• Engagement with professional organizations
• Provides an authentic rationale for clear and detailed lesson plan writing
• Engagement in a full cycle of planning-teaching-reflecting on instruction
• Win-Win-Win partnership with district and informal partners
• Ease of identifying placements in which students can teach science

CHALLENGES

• Students are not seeing science being taught/modelled for them (*could also be an affordance, if instruction wasn’t a good model)
• Coordinating course schedule and teachers’ classroom schedules
  - Lessons are not taught on consecutive days
  - Students may not get to teach all lessons in the unit because of scheduling
• Limited to one grade level and one science content area
• Absences create a cascade of issues for collaborators

NEXT STEPS

We have 2 sections of practicum offered EACH quarter.

Subsequent groups are using these curricula in their teaching OR are focusing on adapting other resources (It’s Debatable, STEM Roadmap) to implement in local schools.