

Haley Leopold  
Senior Honors Project: Journal of Progress

*“Students must keep a project journal throughout the creative process. It should document, in an informal way, many of the following items: how the project unfolded over time; how ideas were generated and decisions made; actions, meetings, significant roadblocks and progress; overall themes, plans, and outcomes; noteworthy moments from the project.”*

*Summer 2015*

Upon receiving the notification of my project’s approval by the Honors Program, I began to conduct some foundational research on various curriculum frameworks, environmental education, experiential learning, and assessment. Some of these resources included the following:

- “Teach English, Teach About the Environment” from the EPA
- *A Review of Research on Project-Based Learning* by John W. Thomas, Ph.D.
- Curriculum resources from Project Learning Tree
- The Leopold Education Project from the Aldo Leopold Foundation
- Research-based practices for English Language Learners
- Best practices in experiential learning
- Guidelines for assessment of experiential learning

*Fall Semester 2015*

August 30-September 5:

During this week, I met with Professor Lisa Schick, my thesis advisor, to discuss the research I had completed over the summer and how to move forward with the rough draft of my project. The anticipation of jumping into the process of creating a curriculum from scratch was at an all-time high this week. Anxiety, excitement, and fear simultaneously course through my blood as I write this; here we go, into the unknown!

September 6-12:

I began outlining a set of goals for this curriculum (i.e. What will students learn through the implementation of this framework?). These goals will create a solid foundation through which the project will unfold. As I wrote them, however, something felt like it was missing. I tried to address all of the pedagogical philosophies that will influence the curriculum, but there seem to be some gaps. I plan to approach Professor Schick about these concerns.

September 13-19:

This week, I met with Professor Schick to discuss the broad learning goals that I had created for the curriculum. During our meeting, I opened up about my concern that some crucial aspect was missing from these goals. Thankfully, she filled in the gap, and we discussed how to add separate language goals specifically geared toward ELLs.

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September 20-26:

I worked on modifying the language goals by looking into the WIDA standards, Dr. Stephen Crashen (second language acquisition theory), and Jim Cummins (BICS and CALPS) for inspiration and support.

September 27-October 3:

Prior to the meeting planned for next week, I prepared questions that were mainly for Dr. Shin Ji Kang, one of my readers that has experience with diversity and multicultural education. After creating the language goals, I realized that this multicultural aspect must be inherent in a curriculum that caters to the ELL population.

October 4-10:

In early October, I met with Professor Schick and Dr. Shin Ji Kang about incorporating a multicultural/culturally relevant pedagogy aspect into the curriculum because of its interconnectedness with the education of ELLs, especially those that have recently moved to America from other countries. We also discussed the addition of an example unit narrative for each grade level, all of which would include a sample lesson. Professor Schick suggested using the SIOP lesson format for this.

October 11-17:

Following my meeting with one of my readers, Dr. Kang, I met with Professor Schick and my other reader, Dr. Timothy Thomas. As a result of Dr. Thomas's expertise in environmental education, the conversation focused on this topic and aspects of place-conscious pedagogy that could be incorporated into the curriculum. I gained valuable insights from Dr. Thomas about environmental education as it relates to place, and Professor Schick helped to relate these topics to ELLs within the classroom, particularly those students who had recently lived in a very different place. A question we pursued: How do we respect, value, and incorporate the experiences of non-native students into a place-based and environmentally focused educational framework?

October 18-24:

At our previous meeting, Dr. Thomas had offered a few resources pertaining to environmental education and, later, sent me a syllabus he created for a class that involved additional resources. I took some time this week to research these sources in order to pull any useful information that could strengthen the curriculum.

October 25-31:

Progress was delayed this week because I was heavily preoccupied with immersion week, a mandated, but important, part of the Elementary Education program at both the 300 and 400 levels.

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November 1-7:

In an elementary education science class, I received a number of informational resources and lesson plans from the Virginia Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom (<https://www.agintheclass.org/>), some of which could prove useful as I progress with the curriculum. Perhaps the sample lesson plans they provided could act as examples of ways in which environmental and place-based education could be incorporated into the classroom.

November 8-14:

This week, I met with Professor Schick to discuss my progress. She offered the names of a few individuals in the fields of experiential learning and social and academic language acquisition for me to include in my research.

November 15-21:

Ample research was conducted for the section entitled "An Interactive Education," particularly for the "Implications for ELLs." I was ecstatic to find so many connections between the educational philosophies I was incorporating into the curriculum and effective practices for teaching speakers of other languages. It's all coming together!

November 22-28:

Progress delayed as a result of Thanksgiving break.

November 29-December 5:

This week, I discovered multiple resources for the "Methods of Assessment" section. One of the most helpful sources was actually a required textbook for an elementary education science class, *Teaching Science to Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Elementary Students*. It gave a multitude of effective assessment procedures to use in classes with ELLs, a few of which I decided to include and elaborate on in my curriculum.

December 6-12:

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of December, I had a meeting with Professor Schick that mainly focused on assessment. We discussed the possibility of adding examples of rubrics, including a rationale within each sample lesson, and mentioning the changes in No Child Left Behind somewhere in the assessment section of the curriculum. A working draft of the project was sent to both readers in order to receive feedback.

December 13-19:

Progress was delayed this week as a result of final exams.

*Spring Semester 2016*

January 10-16

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“An Interactive Education” section was completed this week. Special attention was given to culturally relevant pedagogy because it was added on as an afterthought following my meeting with Dr. Kang; I needed to ensure that it was incorporated fully into the framework, creating a clear relationship between it and the other foundational ideas that inform the curriculum. I believe that the addition of this philosophy makes this curriculum more robust, given its focus on ELLs.

January 17-23

This week, I looked into some additional resources to include in the “List of Instructional Resources.” After looking more closely at the resources provided by the Virginia Foundation for Agriculture in the Classroom, I realized that they would not be as useful in this section of the curriculum as I had previously expected.

January 24-30

During the final days of January, I narrowed my focus onto “The Vision,” carefully developing unit narratives for each grade level. Up to this point, writing these summaries was the most challenging aspect of creating the curriculum because it required a great deal of creativity, imagination, and alignment with the appropriate levels of cognitive development for each grade.

January 31-February 6

This week, I began creating sample lesson plans that aligned with the unit summaries for each grade level. This involved quite a bit of research into various state and national standards that aligned with each lesson’s focus as well as developmentally appropriate cognitive and social theories. These lesson plans proved to be yet another challenging aspect of this curriculum’s development; they required a lot of creative agency on my part, which I both thoroughly enjoy and expend a great deal of effort on.

February 7-13

The finishing touches were made on each lesson plan, all of which were then added to the appendices of the curriculum. I also began drafting my contextual/reflective essay this week. Where do I even begin? I decided to give an overview of the main aspects of the project before jumping into my final reflections in order to create context.

February 14-20

After sending them a final draft of the curriculum, I received feedback from both Dr. Thomas and Dr. Kang. Their insights were helpful in creating a stronger draft, which included some citation corrections, changes to the introduction of the curriculum, and the addition of a preface.

February 21-27

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This week, I met with Professor Schick to discuss the feedback I had received from both of my readers. We also decided on a date for the project presentation (April 19<sup>th</sup>), which allowed the finality of it all to sink in.

February 28-March 5

Additional items were added to the "List of Instructional Resources" page of the curriculum. Based on the goal of creating a user-friendly document, I decided to organize these resources into categories (i.e. "Environmental Education," "Working with English Language Learners," etc.)

March 6-12

Progress was delayed this week as a result of spring break.

March 13-19

This week, I continued writing my contextual/reflective essay. Reflecting back on the project creation process has been a moving experience for me; it has put many aspects of the final years of my college career into perspective, seeing a great deal of things come full circle.

March 20-26

Contextual/reflective essay was finalized.

March 27-April 2

All finishing touches, including final edits and formatting decisions, were made.

April 3-9

Submitted title page to the Honors Program office. Final project will be submitted by April 11, and the project presentation is scheduled for April 19<sup>th</sup>. Then, it's time for graduation!