

Capstone Reflection

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Dates of Capstone _4/30, 5/1, 5/2_ Grade(s) Taught _8th Grade _____

Location _Seward Middle School _____

Subjects Taught __ Science _____

Brief Summary

Present a holistic description of your Capstone experience. Include a profile of your students so that the university supervisor has a better understanding of the context.

I spent my three day capstone experience at the Seward Middle Schools teaching the 8th grade science class about human decomposition. I taught 5 sections on day one and two, but only 3 sections on the third day due to state testing. These were a great group of kids. There are no students in these classes with real behavior problems. However, there were some students in the special education program that needed extra help. Two Para's were also in the class from time to time.

Analytical Reflection

Please reflect on the components listed below. Note strengths as well as modifications for the future.

1. *Hook - My hook was to excite the students into thinking about the possibility of having a body farm here in Seward, down by the fairgrounds. It really got the students excited about our topic, and held their attention throughout the three days I was there. I actually would not change the hook at all. It worked great, and it was a lot of fun suggesting it to the students.*
2. *Tapping into prior knowledge – Before the capstone, I sent a survey to the Middle School for the students to fill out for me. I wanted to know how much they knew about decomposition. I also wanted to find out if any particular television shows had influenced what they thought they knew. During the three days, if we were talking about a particular vocabulary word or idea, I would ask the students to try and figure out the meaning by using ideas or parts of the word they already knew. I would do this again when teaching. I could tell the students were excited and intently following along because they felt they would already know some of the answers to my questions.*

3. *Setting a purpose – The purpose I tried to express to the students was that human decomposition is extremely important to study for many reasons. First, I wanted them to understand that it is a natural process. This does not happen because someone did something wrong. It is how humans are created. Because it does follow a natural process, we are able to study it, and use the information to benefit others. I also tried to explain to the students that one main purpose of science is to study something, and using that information to explain what is happening. In general, people are afraid of things they do not understand. So by studying decomposition, and understanding that it is this natural process, the students will hopefully not be scared of the topic in the future. I am not sure how effective I was on communicating this message over the three days. We talked about it, but I am not sure that it really stuck with the students. So this would be one area that I would try and strengthen in the future.*

4. *Vocabulary strategy – There were so many vocabulary words that I wanted the students to try and remember for future purposes. I had a graphic organizer ready for them to use while we were working through the words. My goal with the organizer was for them to write down two or three main points that would help them remember the words. I believe that this worked for the short amount of time that I was there. Over the three days, they students were able to remember words that we had gone over, and the information was useful for them in order to better understand information they would be looking at on certain websites. For this particular topic, I think the strategy worked alright. However, for a subject that might not be as interesting to the students, I think I would have to rethink how I presented the vocabulary words to the student, and different ways for them to practice those words.*

5. *Comprehension strategy – My main comprehension strategy during the capstone was the use of graphic organizers. They were created in a way for students to follow the natural process of decomposition along with learning key vocabulary terms. I did not want the students to copy down word for word what I had on the power point, so I purposefully limited the amount of room inside each box in which they could take notes. I wanted them to write down what would help them remember the word/concept. On the day of the lab, I had a venn diagram made in which they could compare the three different samples of meat. It was a great way for the students to contrast and compare what they were seeing. The students were then able to use all of the information they had gathered over our three days to help them form an opinion to use for their final project.*

6. *Methodology - Direct instruction and the use of a power point were used primarily on the first day and part of day two. Group work was also a big part of the capstone. There were a few times when the students needed to work with their table partners to answer questions, and then share with the rest of the class. The lab required group work as well. Technology played a huge role in my capstone. There were videos that I shared with the students about the body farm, as well as a lot of individual work as well by the students. They researched*

the body farm, and they looked up information in order to complete their main project that was due at the end of the week. For this particular capstone, I think this was just the right mix of methodologies to get the most out of the lessons for the students. The one tricky part was finding a way to let the students use the computers without finding a way onto a website that was not appropriate for our topic. I found that putting the website on the smart board and walking the students on the path I wanted them to follow really smoothed out the transition for the students, and made everything work much better. I would do all of this again for this particular capstone lesson.

7. Organization of lesson plans – My lesson plans followed a very organized progression from day one through day three. I felt that before the students could move forward, they needed to understand the basic process of decomposition, and some key vocabulary words. On day two, the students were able to try and figure out a case study from the body farm before we spent the first half of the class talking about the variables that influence the rate of decomposition the most. The students then spent the rest of their time on the computer looking at the body farm website and answering questions about information they should be looking for. On day three the students were able to participate in a lab activity where they looked at different forms of decomposition in meat that I had brought into the room. After completing their information sheet the students spent the remainder of the time working on their project for the body farm. Each day built on the next, and all the information was necessary in order to complete their project. I don't believe I would change the order in which I presented this information in the future. It was just enough for each day to keep the attention of the students, and not bore them with little details.

8. Assessment – The bell ringers that I had every day were able to help me assess how the students were doing on our topic. They loved trying to solve the case study, and were really using their imaginations, because they knew it would not be a simple answer. However, the main assessment was the final project. The student had the choice of either writing a letter to the editor, creating a flier, pamphlet or poster that would be used for informational purposes. The idea was that the Uof N Medical Center wanted to establish a body farm in Seward. Many citizens are opposed to the idea. I wanted the students to use their project to support the idea, and to use valid reasons why. What I changed halfway through the first day was to allow the students to also argue against the idea as well. But again, they also had to use valid reasons why. To say it smells bad, looks gross and I don't like it would not be reasons I am looking for. By day two, I also allowed the students to argue both ways if they chose too. Some students liked the idea, but did not like the location I had suggested. In their project, these students supported the idea, but they had to supply an alternative location and realistic reasons as to why this location would be better.

9. Class management – Classroom management went pretty well. However, it was a really great group of kids. I did not have to do much to keep their

attention. There were times when I was not sure how a certain activity would go. For example, I did not know how much time it would take for the students to get their computers from the mobile lab. After the first time, I was able to give my instructions, and show them on the smart board where I wanted them to find the information before they got the computers. This seemed to make the flow of the room much more organized. On day three with the meet lab, I had the class separated into three groups. I decided to move the meat samples instead of the students move from station to station. I didn't know if this would work, but it actually was great, and keep the room from becoming a zoo with movement all over the place. In the future, with this type of situation, I would do exactly the same thing again.

10. *Pacing – This was by far the hardest challenge for me. Each class is so different. I had an idea every day for how I wanted the class to go. For example, the first 10 minutes doing this, the next 20 doing this, and so forth. Day one I was almost always at least 5 minutes short. So I would try and start a conversation about decomposition and different aspects of it that they would be able to use in their project. Day two went much better. The students really had to keep on task in order to finish everything that I had planned for that day. So time much more organized and had a better flow to it. Day three was also much more organized. I did not push them to finish their lab by any particular time period. I wanted the students to really explore their samples if they chose too, and many groups did. Most classes were left with approximately 15 minutes left at the end to start on their project, and really decide what direction they were going to go. So day three had a good flow to it as well. It's hard to say what you would change about pacing until you are actually in the class and see what students you have. My last class of the day had a large majority of students in special education. I found myself going much slower for this class in order to give the students plenty of time to write down things that they felt were important. I think one of the great benefits of teaching at the middle school was that they classes were so short that I was able to teach the lesson multiple times each day. So if a part of my lesson did not work in the first class, I would be able to modify it as the day went on. It is easy to see however that because you only have this short amount of time, it's very important to keep the students engaged from the start all the way to the end of class.*

Holistic Reflection

What did you learn as a result of this experience? How has this experience impacted your perception of self as a teacher?

This experience has been great for my confidence. I know that when I did my field experiences I would find myself wondering if I was going to be able to do this. After these three days, I have no doubt that I can do it. It's a lot of hard work, but I know I can do it. There are things that I need to work on. This capstone was the perfect situation for me as a student. I was able to pick a topic that is very interesting and also one that many students do not hear much about.

I was able to keep their attention through the three days and did not have to worry about boring them. I also realize how much work will go into your first year or two of teaching when you are creating your lesson plans. However, I do realize that you can keep these lessons to use over and over again making the necessary modifications as needed. I also learned that I can think quick on my feet. I did not have any major issues that arose during class, but I did have make a few changes as we went, and I was not bothered by my changes not being on the lesson plan. It felt good having the freedom to change what needed to be changed, knowing that it would make that particular lesson even that much better. As I stated before, this capstone was a great confidence booster, and really gave me the support I was looking for. I know now that I can get up in front of a class, and actually teach them something!