Cassie Suever  
Statement of Purpose  
May 20, 2012  
suever.statementofpurpose.doc

Today’s learners are growing up in a very different time than their parents and grandparents. Communication is instantaneous, information can be sought in an instant with the click of a button or the swipe of a finger, and in our global society, and they have a much greater chance at interacting with people of other cultures and perspectives than ever before. As a teacher of these twenty-first century students, it is my job to balance these demands and teach them the skills they will need to successfully navigate this new, modern world.

In this modern era, full of flashy presentations and instant feedback, passive learning in which the students are expected to glean facts from a text book, or absorb knowledge from a lecturing teacher will not provide them with the skills necessary for their success. They need to be provided with a context for which the content is useful to their lives in order to make learning experiences meaningful and significant (Chiarelott, 2006, p. 4.). In some classrooms in our country today, students are not provided with this context. Instead, they are merely presented information with no strategies provided to process the new content (Anderson, 2012) By using an inquiry-based curriculum in my sixth grade social studies classroom, I can avoid “telling” the students the information they are expected to learn by providing them with a context for learning. This, in turn, will create more meaningful and significant learning experiences that will allow them to analyze and understand their own and differing perspectives about the world in which they live.

Inquiry-based learning units in my social studies course will provide students with several higher-level skills and strategies, such as problem-solving, independent learning, opportunities to collaborate with peers, and learning from real situations. As such, the classroom environment will undergo a shift form a more traditional, teacher-led classroom, to a learning community, in which students and teachers work together to create meaningful and complex learning events. A team of teachers in Tuscon has provided a curricular framework to make this shift in their book, *Learning Together through Inquiry: From Columbus to Integrated Curriculm* (Short, Schroeder, Laird, Kauffman, Ferguson, & Crawford, 1996). In this framework, Short et al. focus upon developing a learning community through an inquiry cycle. Using this framework, the students and I will work together as a team in my classroom to first understand our own experiences and perspectives about a broad concept or essential question in the unit, and then move to explorations of our perspectives within the context of our curriculum. This framework challenges students to be actively involved in the learning process through analyzing their own backgrounds and making meaningful connections to course content, all while learning new problem-solving, independent, research, and collaborative skills to help develop deeper understandings of the content. This type of curriculum does not involve learning in a vacuum; it can only be successful when students take an active role in communicating with their peers, engage in deep understandings about themselves and the world in which they live, and develop strategies for critiquing historical evidence and research. Through these learning experiences, they will develop the higher thinking skills they need in order to be successful citizens in our modern world.

The “Philosophy of Ohio’s Social Studies Academic Content Standards” (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2012) also emphasizes the need for students to be actively involved in their learning. The philosophy focuses on developing participating citizens through four key philosophies, which are a reflection of society’s needs for students. These philosophies center around students making informed decisions, knowing their role in a diverse society, using historical events and people to better understand our modern world, and becoming better problem-solvers in a world with limited resources (p.2). In effect, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) views the social studies curriculum as a tool to provide students with skills they need to be productive and successful citizens. Each of these skills are essential to inquiry-based learning, and require teacher guidance and support to foster their use within the context of the classroom. This can be done by using scaffolding questions in whole class, small group, and individual settings to foster problem solving skills and discussion, and students can develop cognitive and metacognitive processes to deepen their knowledge and communications skills (GE & Land, 2004). This course will use modeling and analysis of expert methods to allow students to apply problem-solving techniques to their own investigations. This will allow them to not only understand historical events in context, but to encourage them to use a variety of strategies to process and evaluate the information they come across, even as they age and become participating citizens in our society.

As can be inferred from the above philosophies presented by ODE, the social studies classroom is focused upon developing participating citizens. All students are citizens in our country and will be expected to use the skills they learned in this course to address the needs of our nation, whether they choose to specialize in a social studies field or not. Since the inquiry-based investigations required by this course will require them to make informed judgments about the material to which they will be exposed, teaching evaluation criteria and strategies for sources and methods of inquiry will provide them with a “gift that keeps on giving” (Anderson, 2012). Though students will be using these evaluations strategies to analyze historical events and relationships, as well as economic and social relationships, the actual skills and processes they are learning will be easily applicable to other content areas and specializations throughout their lives.

In short, the purpose of this inquiry-based course is to allow students to analyze historical, social, and economic events from their own perspectives, while also taking into consideration the perspectives of other social groups and cultures. It will foster independent work habits, while also encouraging students to collaborate with others to develop meaning for new content. These collaborative experiences will allow them to challenge their own perspectives, while also encouraging them to justify beliefs they hold true (Short et al., 1996). Opportunities to evaluate sources and perspectives will also allow them to develop the skills they need to wade through the vast amount of information available to them to seek out reliable and accurate information. Through this process, my students will become well-rounded citizens, who can successfully navigate this modern, global society.

**References**Anderson, L. (2012). What every teacher should know: Reflections on “Educating the developing mind”. *Educational Psychology Review, 21*(4), 13-18.  
 doi: 10.1007/s10648- 011-9189-0

Chiarelott, L. (2006). *Curriculum in context.* Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

E., X.G. & Land, S.M. (2004). A conceptual framework for scaffolding ill-structured problem- solving processes using question prompts and peer interactions. *Educational Technology & Research Development, 52*(2), 5-22.

Ohio Department of Education (2012).*Introduction to Ohio’s 2010 academic content standards: Pre-K-12 social studies*. Retrieved May 15, 2012, fromhttp://www.ode.state.oh.us/GD/ Templates/Pages/ODE/ODEDetail.aspx?page=3&TopicRelationID=1706&ContentID=76598&Con tent=125661Short, K.G., Schroeder, J., Laird, J., Kauffman, G., Ferguson, M.J., & Crawford, K.M. (1996). *Learning together through inquiry: From Columbus to integrated Curriculum.* York, ME: Stenhouse Publishers.