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### **A Reflection on my Experience in the MSciEd program at University of New Hampshire**

Prior to my deciding, in the spring of 2007, to become a professional educator, I took my approaches to teaching method and leadership for granted. I was confident in the skills or material that I taught, well-versed in the subject matter and willing to take the lead in designing curricula and training other teachers in what they had to do. I was comfortable with most of my teaching assignments, such as training police officers and firefighters in computer use, leading white water instructional trips, and taking elementary schools kids through ropes course and adventure game activities. I did face challenges to my complacency when I went into an area where I lacked experience, such as teaching for Outward Bound. In that case, I had no idea what was expected or what were the norms, as I had never taken an OB course. (I had been recruited based on my sea-kayaking skills.) By watching and learning from other instructors, however, I was always able to pick up the information I needed to do the job successfully.

Coming into the classroom as a teaching assistant for the first time in the fall of 2008, I quickly realized that there was a huge difference between the relatively short assignments of my past experiences and the year-long day-to-day task of education in the schoolroom. What I was lacking most was a theoretical basis for my work. Fortunately, I began at UNE at the same time, so as I was discovering what I needed to do with the children, I was learning why and how in my own studies. It was very important for me to find so many of my questions addressed and answered in my courses. As a result, I became far more aware of what I was doing in the classroom and much more sophisticated and flexible in my approach to the students.

I found the on-line structure of the program very helpful for my development as a professional. Since I was already spending my time at the computer, I naturally turned to the internet for more information during research for classes. In this way, I discovered a large number of very useful sites providing insights and ideas, materials lists and lesson plans, professional articles, and all sorts of other interesting and helpful sources. My educational resource bookmark list has grown very long!

One of the best aspects of the UNE experience for me has been the opportunity to communicate with such a diversity of fellow students in the forums. I have had several discussions with teachers in brick-and-mortar programs who have expressed doubts about whether an on-line program would provide the spontaneity and quality of interaction that they get in a classroom. I have found, for

the most part, that spontaneity is not lacking, but that the quality of the responses and the interactions with my fellow students has been even higher than I have experienced in class. People tend to think about what they write somewhat more carefully than about what they say, and so I seldom have read a discussion entry that has not given me something to chew on, and, since it is a forum and not a live chat, the time to consider my response. At the same time, spontaneity is there in some of the "Oh Yeah!" responses and the interesting side discussions that sometimes develop.

If I had to choose which courses influenced my practice in the classroom the most, I would say differential instruction, motivational theory & classroom management, inclusion settings and content literacy, but each one had its own revelations and relevancy to the work I was engaged in. Each helped me in some way to answer the questions I was facing daily in class.

I believe that I have improved my teaching in two ways through my studies at UNE. Firstly, I have become much more focused on the student rather than on content. Also, I have become much more introspective towards my own performance. I have developed a sense of the need for continuous growth and improvement that I don't think will ever leave me.

Now, as I am reaching the end of this course of studies, it is important that I maintain the "visionary gleam" kindled by my time at UNE. This I can accomplish in several ways. I intend to continue to build up my list of useful websites, both for educators and for students. I also plan to join at least one on-line library and/or professional database as a way to keep up with the latest in research. Also, in discussions with my colleagues, I will be more focused on how well solutions to problems or proposed changes in procedure are supported by research.

It is always a little frightening to take the next step in any journey. After my studies at UNE, I feel that much more confident in taking that step.