

1. Title

"The Authentic Environmental Inquiry Model: An Approach to Integrating Science and Social Studies in Urban Elementary Schools"

2-5. Names, affiliations, addresses, email addresses of the authors

April Whatley  
University of New Orleans  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
University of New Orleans  
New Orleans, LA 70198  
awhatley@uno.edu

Cory Buxton  
University of New Orleans  
Department of Curriculum and Instruction  
University of New Orleans  
New Orleans, LA 70198  
cbuxton@uno.edu

6. Abstract

This paper reports on our study of what it means to create authentic learning experiences for teachers and students in a southern American urban elementary school context. We developed a teacher education model emphasizing local environmental, cultural, and historical themes, structured inquiry-based learning, and student-directed assessment strategies. We implemented this model through our work with preservice elementary school teachers at a southern, urban university, and with in-service teachers and grade school students in the lowest performing elementary school in the state of Louisiana (as determined by a newly developed state-wide academic accountability measure). Our study highlights tensions between teaching that aims to promote personally meaningful connections to science and social studies and teaching that aims to promote the acquisition of Western canonical knowledge (as represented in state content standards and assessed through high-stakes accountability plans). By reporting on the kinds of approaches and activities that each of four groups of participants (teacher educator/researchers, preservice teachers, in-service teachers, and grade school students) found to be personally meaningful and how these approaches and activities varied from group to group, we provide insight into one reason why broad-based science and social studies literacy, as advocated in the national reform documents, remains elusive.