

Future educators make field trips happen

By Jorden Rice and Grace Kelley
Contributors

This semester, the students in EDU 318: Methods in Teaching Elementary Science and Social Studies, have been learning how to plan and implement field trips in their future experiential-based classrooms.

Collaborating with Dr. Brown and Dr. Hillyer, the students planned two separate field trips to enhance the experiential content in the professors' respective college courses. The first step of this intensive process required the future teachers to apply for Brevard College Pedagogy funds to pay for the vans and activity fees.

Next, the EDU 318 students met with Brown and Hillyer to establish specific historical and biological learning targets for visiting Vance Birthplace and Holmes State Educational Forest, both local educational sites. Then, the students had a phone conference with site educator at Vance Birthplace and met with the educators

at Holmes to explore ways to align the learning targets with potential site activities.

The face-to-face contact combined with the phone call allowed for conversations about the curriculum and fostered undeniable confidence ahead of the trip. The EDU 318 students created a two-column "Noticing and Wondering" note-catcher to provide a space to jot down any new learning and/or questions for Holmes. Additionally, the students created a brochure to capture knowledge about Governor Vance's subsistence mountain farming and the lives of enslaved people working on the plantation.

The first trip, during the week before Fall break, had BIO 105 students pile into vans to head to Holmes near Dupont Forest. Small raindrops began to fall but did not deter the students from a phenomenal learning opportunity. Divided into two groups, the students completed four learning stations that covered a range of topics from the Food Web to the Carbon Cycle, led by Holmes environmental educators, Susan Fay, Amy Kinsella, EJ Dwiggens, and Jan Dauster.

By the end of the experience, the rain was coming down in buckets but it still didn't dampen the learning. Ranger Amy Kinsella built a fire to warm the soaking wet bodies, which added to her presentation about the benefits of control burning.

"All the lessons at the forest were on target with the learning outcomes for our ecosystem's lesson," said Hillyer.

"My favorite part of Holmes State Forest was learning about Western NC mushrooms," said current student, Brad Stewart. "I think it helped our BIO 105 class to actually see an ecosystem in person rather than just reading about it in our textbook."

Opportunities for learning how to facilitate a field trip continued when the students visited Governor Vance's Birthplace in Weaverville, NC on the sunny Friday before Fall break.

As the students in NC 255 toured the mountain plantation and replica dwellings, the museum guide spoke directly about how the terminology used to describe slavery over the years has changed. Instead of using the term "slave," the preferred historically accurate term is now "enslaved person."

This shift in language reflects the change in mindset as it acknowledges that slavery was a condition that people were forced into, not a choice. According to author Andi Cumbo, "By changing from the use of a name – slaves – to an adjective – enslaved – we grant these individuals an identity as people and use a term to describe their position in society rather than reducing them to that position. In a small but important

way, we carry them forward as people, not the property that they were in that time."

One main activity at Vance's Birthplace was called "History Mystery." During this time, various artifacts from the past were handed out and groups had a few minutes to figure out as much as possible about the artifact. Then, a representative from each group would go up to the front of the room, present the object to everyone, and talk about how they think it might have been used. Then, different hints would be given until students finally figured it out or ended up admitting defeat.

Students helped digest this information through the use of the reflective brochure. Inside, students had to pick one artifact, create an illustration, identify its purpose and its modern alternative. "Seeing a difference in the way they lived. It helped me appreciate what we have," History major and teacher candidate, Allison Rogers said.

The field experience was finished with a craft. Everyone was able to make a button spinner which was described as the fidget spinner of the past. The construction of a button spinner was quite simple as it was a wooden button on a white string. The real skill came in trying to use one.

"The Vance Birthplace historic site helped students understand what slavery looked like in the mountains. Most people imagine an antebellum plantation with house servants, an overseer, and women in hoop skirts. The distance between mountain masters and the enslaved was not so dramatic, but our guide helped students see and understand the gulf between them, nonetheless," said Dr. Brown.

"Because many students in North Carolina history are education majors, I appreciated the way the guide tried to share information on two levels. At the same time that she noted the differences in daily life between planters and the enslaved, she helped future teachers develop ideas for talking about this difficult topic with even elementary-aged children."

Students in HIS 255 will use the experiences at Vance's Birthplace leading forward into their final project. Moving full circle, in December, the college students in HIS 255 will teach fourth graders at Brevard Elementary a lesson about children in the past.

Reflecting on the chance to have her methods students, Jorden Rice and Grace Kelley, plan field trips, Dr. Keiser said, "This is what makes Brevard College special. We are small enough to work collaboratively with our colleagues to make experiential education happen for our students."

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