

First-grade teacher explores exotic Baja for summer school

Trip was part of Laura Clawson's work to earn her masters degree at Miami University.

By Richard O Jones, Staff Writer

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ROSS TWP. — Elda Elementary first-grade teacher Laura Clawson will bring a different world of experience to her classroom this fall.

Clawson was among 20 teachers to study at the UNESCO World Heritage site on Bahia de los Angeles on the Sea of Cortez in Mexico.

In this biosphere reserve, she and her fellow educators spent nine days learning about methods of inquiry and educational practices while they explored two diverse ecological systems.

They spent part of the time in the desert, where they visited a cactus farm and spent a night hunting luminescent scorpions, and part of the time on the coast, where they went snorkeling and swam alongside a 20-foot-long juvenile whale shark.

While these environments seem a lot more exotic than the wildlife area at Elda Elementary, Clawson said that some of the methods she learned would work well when she and her first-graders begin studying habitats, which is part of their science curriculum.

“When we visited the cactus farm, they had us make up our own names for them, and then when we got back, they told us the real name, so that stuck with us better,” she said. “We will try the inquiry methods that we learned about when we talk about habitats.”

The trip was part of Clawson's study to earn her master's degree, taken through the Global Field Program from Project Dragonfly at Miami University. The GFP master's is based on the Earth Expeditions program from Dragonfly and the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, which has engaged educators in firsthand educational and scientific research at conservation hot spots around the world since 2004, according to Jamie Bercau Anzano, Dragonfly program director.



The program involves Clawson writing papers before and after the experience in her area of interest, “Inquiry in an Inclusive Classroom,” which explores whether students learn better from inquiry — exploring the answers to their own questions — or other forms of study.

Inquiry, she said, capitalizes on the students' own sense of wonder to inspire them to do their own research.

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