

Lessons from the Field: A Collection of Findings from Teacher Candidate Field Experiences

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Lessons from the Field: A Collection of Findings from Teacher Candidate Field Experiences

Edited by

Tony Durr

The following is a collection of papers from the field experiences of teacher candidates. In small groups, these teacher candidates discussed common themes from their individual junior year field experiences. Each small group then wrote a paper to communicate what they learned about a focused, self-selected topic. This is a collection of those three collaborative papers.

Paper #1: Google Classroom

by

Megan DeSmith, Sarah Munson, Jon Schulte

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Google Classroom has been a tool that many teachers are taking advantage of in their classrooms. This tool allows students to have access to class materials, assignments, and announcements. Teachers can create assessments and provide feedback that students can access seconds after being published. Google Classroom is also free to schools. Additionally, Google Classroom can be used to connect teachers from other schools and collaborate by sharing lesson plans, slides, activities, etc. In all, Google Classroom allows students and teachers alike to have a better classroom experience.

Sarah

I was able to observe a sixth-grade health class where the teacher used Google Classroom for assessment. The teacher had allowed her students to take their quiz for the tobacco unit either on paper copies that she had printed out or digitally through Google Classroom. This was the first time that I saw Google Classroom used to assess student learning through a test or quiz. My high school had Google Classroom which gave me some prior experience with it, but it was only used for turning in assignments. Seeing it used for a summative assessment allowed both the students and the teacher to see their score instantly, rather than having to wait for a paper copy to be graded. The teacher also had different activities and educational games attached on her Google Classroom page which kept the students occupied and quiet until everyone could finish their quiz.

Megan

I got to see Google Classroom in action in a seventh-grade science classroom. The teacher used Google Classroom as a way for a worksheet submission assessment. The question numbers from the book that the students were supposed to work on were written on the white board. The students were instructed to read the question and find the answer in the book and then

type their answers into the Google Classroom worksheet. After they were finished, they could submit the assignment and it would tell them which questions they got incorrect. They were told that they could submit the assignment as many times as they wanted to get the grade that they wanted.

There were some pros and cons that I noticed during this experience with Google Classroom. It was beneficial for students to get instant feedback on their work. They were also able to do the assignment multiple times within the same day, which allowed them to get the most out of the assignment. Some issues were that the technology is picky about how the answers were given, so if the students capitalized any letters or spelled something wrong it would count the answer incorrect.

I have also had some experience with Google Classroom as a student. When I was in high school, we used Google Classroom to mainly access PowerPoint slides to print. I did have a math teacher who tried something different one year where she had us complete and correct our homework at home and then submit how many questions we got correct, how many questions we got incorrect, and what questions we wanted to review. She would take this information and review the questions that we had trouble with at the beginning of class the next day.

Jon

Within my field experiences, I saw Google Classroom being utilized on several occasions. I observed Lee Schmidt, a social studies teacher at Brookings High School, who uses Google Classroom (including his students). Additionally, at the Standards 101 workshop I attended, my mom (who led the workshop) taught me more about the practicality of Google Classroom, its benefits, and why schools and teachers in southwest Minnesota have made the switch to Google Classroom.

When I observed Lee Schmidt, the first task to begin his lesson was telling his students to pull up Google Classroom and begin reviewing the learning objectives. I later learned that every lesson, every slide, and every assignment that Schmidt uses is available to his students on Google Classroom (he noted that he does this so that those who missed the lesson does not have to go through the ordeal of reaching out to him by email or worry about missing information, since it is available to them online). Schmidt also used Google Classroom for assignments; the one I witnessed was a map quiz that was through Google Classroom. He later told me that using Google Classroom for this was extremely convenient since he does not have to worry about losing their quiz and that the second the students finished the quiz, he could see it. Additionally, Schmidt recommended Google Classroom because he and all the other social studies teachers share their slides, lessons, activities, and labs just to bounce ideas off each other.

Luckily, I completed this field experience before I attended the Standards 101 workshop in Redwood Falls, Minnesota where I was able to ask my mom questions about what I learned from Schmidt's classroom. She was a little shocked that I had not learned about Google Classroom yet since all the schools she helped in southwest Minnesota uses Google Classroom. She informed me that many schools are utilizing Google Classroom because it is free (the high school I attended used Schoology, which is not a cheap sum of money to use according to my mom). She then gave me her work iPad and let me sift through some of her schools' resources through Google Classroom. Even further, she explained how she uses Google for everything, especially Google Drive. She emphasizes that I should get accustomed to Google, since a teacher can back up every lesson or file made and never have to worry about losing it. She also shared some resource links that are a collaboration of different lessons teachers from all over southwest Minnesota who have shared to utilize others' work in their classroom. I believe that is what stood

out to me most; Google Classroom is not just for the individual teacher and their students but can be utilized together by teachers all over the state or country. It put me at ease realizing that teachers, even from different schools, are willing to collaborate and that there are tons of resources for the teacher to ensure their classroom is creative and engaging!

Conclusion

Throughout our field experience, we witnessed Google Classroom being used as a tool by many teachers in their classrooms. By utilizing Google Classroom, students can have access to class materials, assignments, and announcements in a moment's notice. The main theme that we noticed was that teachers were able to create assessments, provide instant feedback to the students, and be a means of connecting teachers across all fields to share their resources. Google Classroom is a great free resource to schools that allows students and teachers alike to have a better digital classroom experience.

Assessments Observed in Field Experiences

by

Quincy Hanzen

Anna Mundahl

Sarah Schanzenbach

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Student assessments are an integral piece of the educator juggernaut used in classrooms to gauge the progress of students. These assessments are both beneficial to the student and the educator. The teacher gets feedback as to how beneficial and effective their teaching strategies and lesson plans been, and the students get a chance to showcase their own learning via said teacher, or lack thereof if needed. Some classic forms of assessment include exams, projects, papers, observations, etc. These assessments can either accurately or inaccurately assess the students and their level of taking in content knowledge. Some assessments work better than others, and it is a highly important role of the educator to be aware of what assessment is best for not only their content area, but also the individualistic needs of each student at hand. To wit, another role of the educator is assigning assessments to accommodate the needs of each student. For example, a teacher may assign a paper to be written outside of class time, looking to accommodate time constraints said students may have via a variety of circumstances. As teacher candidates studying at South Dakota State University, we had the opportunity to experience many teachers assigning assessments to a vast field of students. In the following paragraphs, each of us describes and reflects on one well-conducted assessment as well as one possibly problematic assessment we observed.

Per Anna, “Participating in the Jack Rabbit Invite at South Dakota State University was a treat. I was able to be a judge in the individual Ag Sales competition. This entailed a one-on-one interview process with the student. This interview was a practice sales in the store. They were given the product information weeks before the competition along with four examples of customers. Key things to look at during the interview are; eye contact, thorough knowledge of products, the closing of the sale, assurance that this is the product that I want, review of the sale,

general conversation skills, confidence in a sales position, and offers to other products in the store. This offers students a wonderful opportunity to display their product knowledge and sales smarts.

I also judged at the National FFA convention in the Farm Business Management competition. This was a form of traditional exam assessment, while not my personal favorite it does have some good aspects at the bulk testing level. As it usually goes, the tables were lined and the tests were placed. The students had two hours to complete 240 questions. This seemed like too complicated of a task in my mind, less than 40 seconds to complete each question is daunting. We did use two forms of assessment during the competition, the exam along with a team activity, that was judged by the participation of each team member.”

In Quincy’s experience, “One of the forms of assessment that was observed in the classroom came from shadowing a special education teacher at Brookings High School. An important task this teacher has is to go into other classrooms that her students are in and observe them to notice how they are behaving in that environment. She took very detailed notes of the student such as moments when he would get off track, why he got off track, if/how he got back on track. This type of assessment can be critical to ensure the success of students. It is important that special education teachers are keeping track of their student’s success in other classrooms as well rather than just their own. Another type of assessment witnessed was at the Boys and Girls Club. This assessment came in a different form as it was in a sort of rewards/consequences system. If the students were behaving well and the workers noticed their behavior they may receive a reward such as becoming the student of the month. However, if students are acting knowingly and purposely against the rules of the club, they could receive a consequence -- so many consequences end up in larger repercussions for the student. This tactic of assessment is

useful when managing the environment of the club since most kids would rather work towards being student-of-the-month than receiving consequences. However, this assessment may also fail to include the students who fall in the middle -- those who do not go out of their way to be noticed for student of the month or who do not constantly misbehave to receive consequences. Students could even start to misbehave just to receive those consequences and the attention they seek and need.”

Sarah reflects, “It has been a fascinating journey to spend time at the Sioux Falls Boys & Girls Club after school program this semester. The staff are faced with an interesting dichotomy of simply providing a safe haven to underprivileged youth in the area, yet also being tasked with making sure the students involved are being not only challenged and educated outside the classroom, but being assessed in said education. Because of the lack of authority given to an after school program, I see them struggle day in and day out. There is a large emphasis on reading, but the focus on reading is largely enveloped in what feels like bribery. ‘Read to a staff member or volunteer for ten minutes; get screen time. Read a whole book: get more screen time.’ There is little applause or excitement in learning for the sake of learning, or the sake of personal achievement. All-time in the library is wrapped in a package of how many minutes one can earn to be in front of a screen. I am reminded of our time in class talking about the problematic nature of extrinsic motivation versus intrinsic motivation, especially in referencing the presentations of the book ‘Driven.’ While I understand the club’s thought process in utilizing a tit for tat extrinsic model, as it seems to only work in the short term, I am frustrated with their choice to not focus on the more permanent and long term intrinsic motivational spirit that promotes life-long learning skills.

On a positive note, I look to an exceptional program the Boys & Girls Club offers, which is a student-run store. It is open two days a week, and the only adult intervention they receive is a staff member controlling the Black Friday-esque chaos that ensues upon each opening. One could argue that a store is not an assessment, per say, but I disagree. It is the ultimate assessment of hard-working students making a business plan, wherein they decide how to run their small, local business in a way that appeals to both their economic interests, as well as capturing the attention of their clientele. Are the business runners tested in a classroom type way? Absolutely not. Their assessment lies in how well they work together as a team and sell product to their peers twice a week, thus ensuring they will not only be allowed to stay open the following week but have the clout to offer better and/or more product in the future. It's a level of real-world assessment very few of us ever got to experience at a young age!"

Overall, the three of us observed different ways in which assessment was performed to gauge student's understanding of materials. The assessments we encountered came in the form of judging competitions and conventions, observing students, and viewing reward/consequence systems that were in place. Through our observations, we all have developed ideas for how we hope to conduct assessments ourselves in the future as educators.

Promoting Positive Learning Environments

by

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Conner Bertram

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Every grade level has important aspects that teachers need to take into consideration when thinking about creating a positive learning environment. It will not simply happen, the teacher needs to engage the proper tactics and ideas in their students and classroom guidelines, no matter the age of the students. Children are more likely to feel safe to learn and grow if the teacher conducts themselves in a way that promotes this.

Early Childhood Education looks very different from older grades, because it is impossible to expect such young children to sit for too long of a time and learn what you would typically learn in school, so teachers need to provide for both moments and play and learning. What works to promote a positive learning environment not only looks different for every class, but also every child as well. At this age it is very important to have a very individualized approach to your classroom and teaching strategies.

There are a lot of ways to create a negative learning environment for young children. At times, teachers can have one individual that cannot seem to behave. Things simply get worse if teachers let their feelings get the best of them and think negatively of that child. Children can sense the feelings of those around them better than we think. Teachers need to have great skill in keeping emotions in check if they are to create a positive learning environment for their students.

It is also not ideal for children if they have inconsistency within the staff that are looking after them. They may know the rules when their normal teachers are there, but just like every other age group, having a substitute causes them to think they can get away with anything. To promote positive and safe learning, consistency in staffing is very important.

Even though many things could go wrong, it is also easy for things to go right. For those children that may struggle with emotions, this may be an instant where a teacher uses what is

called ‘station time’ as a way to separate them from either all the other children, or just the ones that seem to be causing them the most trouble. Providing things like sensory play for those who are angrier, or puzzles for those who need some help with fine motor skills, are all vital and help the children feel important and heard. This all promotes a very positive environment for even the youngest students.

In elementary schools to obtain the key to a successful classroom, teachers must put in a lot of creative effort to comply with very enthusiastic students. In one instance, there is a 3rd grade classroom in which the teacher worked with the students to set up some basic ground rules that they all agreed to follow and obey to do things that they wanted to do. For example, these students wanted a seating arrangement that would allow them to be able to sit by their friends. Initially, it seemed that this could never work, simply because it would cause a big distraction for everyone’s learning and it would also make it difficult for the teacher to keep the students on track. The teacher came up with a smart idea to negotiate with the students, and they agreed that if she lets them sit in their desired seating spots, that they must be productive. This was a surprisingly easy way to solve this issue, but it worked phenomenally, and there were even times that students would encourage each other to stay on track so they could keep their seating arrangements. This emphasized the fact that communication is a substantial technique that can help improve the relationship between teachers and students to create a more positive learning environment. This little thing that simply involved a seating chart, worked really well. She got what she wanted by having them be responsible for each other’s behavior, forming a class environment that will promote success.

Along this positivity, came a lot of moments of negativity as well. Since it is winter, all these students are enjoying recess more. One thing they do not enjoy is wasting their

recess time putting on their proper winter clothing. These students learned that they could save time if they kept their gloves and hats in their desk, and they could start putting them on minutes before they got the go-ahead from their teacher. The sound of multiple desktops rising and then being slammed down in one classroom can be very distracting. The teacher tried disciplining the students by making them stay in their desks past their recess time, but it never seemed to phase the students. It might have worked better if the teacher made them leave their winter essentials in their closet area where they keep their coats, and let them know that if they are behaving, they would have time to put all their stuff on without creating a distraction. This situation was really intriguing to see, simply because it is easy to notice the difference in the classroom environment when students all of a sudden start to forget how good they were doing. The classroom environment can go from running smoothly, to the complete opposite. Teachers have to know how to maintain control and communicate with the students, using this with elementary grade students, will help improve classroom environment, which leads to overall positive teaching and learning.

When looking at having a positive classroom environment for middle schoolers it seems to be dependent on the teaching strategies, activities, and the lay out of the classroom. Middle schoolers are easily distracted in school and often it is difficult for them to focus on the material. In one sample classroom, the teacher did not have desks for the students, just chairs. This made it easier for the teacher to do the activities that she had planned. These activities were meant to help engage the students in the material and learn from it. In this class, they did not have to take any notes, so most of their learning seemed to come in different forms that did not require a desk.

The teacher also used interesting teaching strategies during the student's assessment, they were able to move around the classroom and sit in bean bag chairs or other more comfortable

options. This classroom layout and teaching strategy helped to create a positive classroom environment that everyone seemed to enjoy. However, this is also dependent on how the teacher is acting. For example, if the teacher is energetic and positive about the lesson plan, the students will likely be more interested and engaged in the lesson as well. Compared to if the teacher is acting more strictly it will be much less engaging to the students in the classroom. By having a positive classroom environment, it will help to keep students' behavioral problems to a minimum.

A negative classroom environment at the middle school level might occur when the students were given less structure in the classroom or when the students had too much free time after their work. One student had a particularly difficult time, they had finished his work early and kept creating a distraction for the other students still working on their assignments. The teacher got after the student several times until he finally quieted down. One thing the teacher could have done instead for the student being a distraction was giving him more work to do or have an activity involved for students that finish their work early so that they are not a distraction. Positive classroom environments involve proper use and planning of the allotted time, they help to enhance, promote, and encourage students' learning in all academic levels.

The way a high school teacher would set up a positive work environment in the classroom is very similar to how it would look in a middle school setting, with the exception that the work and information load needs to be a bit more rigorous in order to keep the students engaged and challenged. An example of this seen was that as the teacher was conducting a review with her students, she would encourage them when they were close to the right answer and would congratulate them when they answered the questions correctly. This gives the sense

that it is alright to try to answer a question, even if they would get it wrong. When they feel encouraged when they answer questions correctly, it lifts their confidence in that certain area.

Another example of a positive environment was demonstrated when one class found out that one of the teacher's aides accomplished a big goal in her life and the whole class started to clap, but one of the students, who has autism, started to become irritated by the clapping. When the teacher noticed this, she asked everyone to stop clapping immediately, asked if the student was alright, and let her go into the hallway to calm down. She then admitted that she forgot that clapping triggered that student and that nobody should blame themselves. The teacher, even when she made a mistake, made sure to remedy the situation and reassure her students that it was not their fault. This also showed that she was making sure that the environment for that particular student would be as comfortable as possible after the fact. They were then able to continue with the lesson normally.

There was a sense of a negative environment in classrooms where the teachers overreacted to a certain misbehavior or when they treated students poorly who needed help. An example of this was demonstrated when one of the students called a person involved in a sensitive topic they were talking about a 'weirdo.' The teacher became angry, raised her voice, and told him to knock it off. The other students seemed uncomfortable with how the teacher reacted to that student's comment and there was a moment of silence before they got back to their lesson. Based off of class discussions, there are very few instances where it is appropriate to yell at a student, and in doing so, may scare other students and cause more of a disruption to the classroom than if the teacher would not have said anything at all. Another instance of a teacher creating a negative learning environment is when a student came up to her for help on her homework and the teacher looked irritated that the student was taking time away from her from

grading her classes homework. This is a terrible thing for a teacher to do, and will only make the student and other students in that classroom feel that the teacher does not want them to ask for help, which may end up with students performing more poorly than if the teacher was eager to help each student with joy. From these experiences, the teacher's attitude and how they handle themselves in stressful situations makes a world of difference in if the classroom environment is negative or positive.

In conclusion, even though teachers have to consider certain things, depending on the grade level they are teaching, the main factor in if a classroom environment is positive or negative has to do with the teachers themselves. If a teacher is good at differentiating, keeping the students engaged by structuring the lesson and tasks appropriately, being actively interested in the students and their success, and able to appropriately handle themselves in stressful situations, they will be well on their way to creating a positive classroom environment that fosters greater academic success, engagement, and discovery. If, however, a teacher conducts themselves in ways contrary to these points, their students will most likely be disengaged, earn lower grades, and does not add to the positive learning environment that teachers should strive for.