509M – 2 credits: Expectations, and assignments
Theme: Curriculum analysis and planning OR special needs students

You are required to complete one more practicum experience before moving on to the 3-credit practicum in which you will begin to have more regular teaching duties. Again, make the most of your practicum hours; they stand to teach you a great deal!

Expectations

During this practicum experience, you should be gradually moving into the position where you teach an occasional lesson, help your teacher plan curriculum and instruction, and begin to look ahead to even more structured responsibilities next term. Given the 1:30 ratio for field experience hours, you will need to log 60 hours to fulfill the minimum hour requirement. As always, we believe more is better! As with the previous practicum experiences, record your hours on the 509M – 2 credits tracking sheet found in the virtual library (http://www.wou.edu/~girodmlibrary).

As before, we have identified a number of activities that we believe will be helpful in your goal of becoming an excellent teacher. Take them seriously; they are at the heart of good teaching! If you are currently working in a school, you may need to arrange to visit another teacher’s classroom during your prep time to do these observations.

Assignments

Some of the activities you’ll be completing are from an excellent book called “Learning to teach: A critical approach to field experiences.” The book is no longer is print so the appropriate activities, titled 509M – 2 credit activities, are found in the virtual library (http://www.wou.edu/~girodmlibrary). Retrieve them as soon as possible.

You have a choice and can complete activities in one of two areas. The first option explores curriculum and planning issues while the second option explores issues relating to special needs students. Choose the set of activities that are most interesting to you, complete all activities in that option AND the corresponding final paper. Remember, the final paper is the only thing you’ll turn in at the end of the quarter but you should draw on your experiences from the activities in completing the final paper.

Option 1: Curriculum analysis and planning

1. Many teachers use textbooks to support their instruction (those who do not probably have an appropriate textbook but choose not to use it – ask to borrow it for this activity). Textbooks often play a crucial role in how subject matter gets portrayed. Complete the activity called “Textbook Analysis” giving particular attention to the questions in the reflective narrative.

2. Teachers often ask students to complete activities that are designed to support student learning. Complete the activity called “Learning Activities” to get a sense of how activities do or do not contribute to learning.
3. Teachers constantly make decisions about what will and will not get taught. Complete the activity called “What Counts as Knowledge?” paying particular attention to the questions in the reflective narrative section.

The final assignment for option 1

After working through the three previous activities, you have hopefully begun to form some opinions about what ought to and ought not to get learned in your subject matter area. Additionally, you have probably begun to form some opinions about how to best support learning of important subject matter ideas. Write a 3-5 double-spaced page paper describing your thoughts on what’s important content in your area, how to best teach it, and what activities or projects might best support it. Draw on your efforts in the three activities as your “data” to help support your argument.

Option 2: Working with special needs students

All information for these activities is included below.

1. Ask the teacher you’re working with to identify a student who seems to be struggling academically. Spend a few days observing that student recording behaviors, routines, and tendencies that you believe are indicative of this student’s struggles. Be discreet but honest in your observations. Go visit a building special education teacher and inquire about the range of usual special education services available to students. Record your thoughts about what services or support this student might need to be more successful academically. Share your thoughts with your mentor teacher and write a bit about your investigations.

2. Ask the teacher you’re working with to identify a student who is perhaps talented and gifted. As before, spend a few days observing that student recording behaviors, routines, and tendencies that you believe are indicative of this student’s giftedness. Be discreet but honest in your observations. Go visit a building counselor and inquire about services for talented and gifted students. Consider some options that regular teachers might employ in challenging this student with subject matter learning. Share your thoughts with your mentor teacher and write a bit about your investigations.

3. Ask the teacher you’re working with to identify a student who’s first language is other than English. As with the other students, spend a few days observing this student recording behaviors, interactions, and situations that are indicative of this student’s struggles to learn English. Visit the person in your building who works most closely with 2nd language learners and ask questions about the range of services provided to these students. Again, consider some options that regular teachers might employ in helping this student to be more successful in school – academically or even socially. You may have to redefine success to be something like “make more English-speaking friends” or “feel more a part of the local school culture.” Share your thoughts with your mentor teacher and write a bit about your investigations.
The final assignment for option 2

Consider the "Leave No Child Behind" political climate that teachers work in today. How should teachers address the massive student diversity that exists in schools? What will you try to do? What are some "best teaching practices" you observed that seem to be useful for diverse students? Describe some instances in which student needs were clearly not being met. How will you respond to these issues as a teacher? Describe some instances in which you saw how teachers were addressing student difference in positive and effective ways. In the process, write a little bit about the range of student diversity that exists in the school or classroom in which you have been observing. In all, your final paper should be between 2-3 pages.
Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT)  
Western Oregon University  
Practicum Tracking Sheet  
Ed 509M: 2 credits

MAT student name: ____________________________

Quarter enrolled (i.e. spring '03): ____________________________

Each 1-hour of practicum credits equates to 30 hours of on-site experience. To log enough hours to earn 2 practicum credits, one needs to spend 60 hours in a school or working at your practicum site. This sheet is designed to help you and WOU keep track of your hours. Please fill it out completely and submit it at the end of the quarter in which your practicum credits are being earned\(^1\).

Name of practicum site (i.e. Central High School): ____________________________

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Times on site</th>
<th>Total hours</th>
<th>Brief activities log</th>
<th>Teacher's initials</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/12/02</td>
<td>8:00 – 11:00 a.m.</td>
<td>3 hours</td>
<td>watched 1(^{st}) – 3(^{rd}) period in Mrs. Sanders social studies class and tutored 3 absent students</td>
<td>Ms</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

\(^1\) Documentation of practicum hours is in partial fulfillment of credit requirements. Other assignments may exist which need to be completed prior to practicum completion.
TEXTBOOK ANALYSIS

Background

Studies have shown that the single force driving most classroom instruction is the textbook. This is true at all levels of education from elementary through university. The textbook is the source, the "founder of truth and knowledge," unimpeachable and, presumably, accurate and neutral. The textbook is the curriculum guide: It controls our learning calendar, and dominates our approach to teaching. This probably comes as no surprise to you because you have read textbooks for years. In fact you are reading a criticism of textbooks in a textbook at this moment, and this probably seems perfectly normal. That is precisely the point. We have come to accept the overwhelmingly powerful influence of textbooks with nary a second thought. Textbooks are one of the taken-for-granted aspects of organized education in this country.

Activity

When teachers are asked to evaluate texts, they usually are given a set of guiding questions such as these: Is the reading level appropriate? Are the chapters arranged in a logical manner? Are the illustrations appropriate and interesting? Is the information accurate? Is the cover durable? Are the ancillary materials complete? and so forth. These are mechanical questions. This exercise challenges you to look differently at texts.

To begin, obtain a copy of the primary text used in the classroom you are observing. If secondary texts are available, use them for comparative purposes. If a teacher's manual is available, inspect that also. Consider the following questions:

1. Where does knowledge originate? How does the textbook address this question? Does it tell students to ask the teacher or to discover for themselves? Does it challenge students to create their own knowledge or does it simply tell, transmitting knowledge to students as passive receivers?

2. Who is the authority: the book, the teacher, the student, or some combination?

3. What hidden messages are embedded in the textbook? Are there obvious gender, racial, or class-specific biases or stereotypes? This can be tricky at first, but look at stories, narratives, examples, and illustrations. These can be powerful media for transmitting particular messages to the unwitting reader.

4. Examine the table of contents. What is missing? It is not so much what knowledge is missing as what perspectives are missing?

5. What could or should have been included? What would have made this text more complete, more diverse, and more representative?

Reflective Narrative

Did you consider applying these questions to texts you are using in other classes? What about the text you are reading now? What about a “world history” text that might ignore a significant portion of the planet by focusing on western Europe? How many economic systems other than capitalism are examined?

As a teacher in your own classroom, how might you supplement the texts you examined? Using available technology (hypertext, World Wide Web, etc.), construct alternatives for traditional texts. Draw up some specific examples and discuss them with your host teacher.
Related Readings


LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Background
Part of being a teacher is planning activities for students. Embedded in the activities teachers design are hidden assumptions about students’ abilities and needs. Often these assumptions are based on nonacademic criteria such as race, social class, gender, culture, and/or ethnic origin.

Activity
Observe two or more classrooms to explore the learning activities in which students are supposed to be engaged. If possible, select two classes that differ in the supposed makeup of students (e.g., a gifted class and a general class). Use the data sheet from Fig 3.5 to record your observations.

Reflective Narrative
What differences did you observe between the two classes? What do you think is the significance of these differences? Why do you think these differences exist? Might it be teaching style, course content, perceptions of students, expectations of teachers, or some combination thereof?

Related Readings
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Class #1</th>
<th>Class #2</th>
<th>(Class #3)</th>
<th>(Class #4)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing on the board</td>
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<td>Note taking</td>
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<td>Worksheets</td>
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<td>Listening</td>
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<td>Asking questions</td>
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<td>Group work</td>
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<td>Talking with one another</td>
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<td>Computer work alone</td>
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<td>Computer work in groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Watching a video</td>
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<td>Reading</td>
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<td>&quot;Hands-on&quot; activities</td>
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<td>Group discussion</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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</tbody>
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FIG 3.5. Learning Activities Worksheet (reproduce as needed).
WHAT COUNTS AS KNOWLEDGE?

Background

One major target for examining hidden curricula involves the source and validity of various knowledge forms. In many classrooms the text (in whatever form) is presented as the primary and ultimate source of knowledge. Typically, the knowledge presented in textbooks has its origins in a White, European view of the world. Consequently, people of color, women, and even students have begun to question the validity of what is being taught in schools.

The question “Whose knowledge gets validated in the classroom?” is an important one for preservice teachers to consider, because embedded in this question is the issue of power and authority. By defining what counts as legitimate knowledge for students, we also are declaring the most acceptable ways to see the world and of living and thinking in the world. The push for multicultural education is one effort being made to rewrite the script that dictates what counts as appropriate school knowledge. Other curriculum innovations, such as the whole language approach and the Foxfire method, recognize teachers and students as valid sources of knowledge.

Activity

Observe a classroom for several days and interview the teacher to explore the following questions:

1. Does the teacher use a textbook? If so, is the text used sequentially (chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3, etc.)?
2. Does the teacher use a supplementary manual?
3. Does the teacher use additional trade books? If so, obtain a copy of the reading list.
4. How does the teacher try to connect the material in the text with the lives of the students in the class? (see the Brain Compatible Classroom Exercise)
5. What opportunities exist for students to make decisions about the knowledge being offered?
6. How is the teacher held accountable for the knowledge to be covered in the course? Might this affect the manner in which he or she teaches?
7. Does the teacher follow a mandated state or district curriculum guide?

Reflective Narrative

What did you discover? Did you observe any evidence that the official knowledge is still White, male, and Eurocentric? Can you cite any evidence from your observations to indicate that schools are making changes in what counts as appropriate knowledge? Was there any evidence of multiculturalism in the curriculum? How is knowledge controlled in this classroom: Who decides what will be learned and how learning will take place? Would you agree with Shannon that over time teachers have “lost much of their responsibility ... and control of the goals and methods of instruction”?

Related Readings


