

Field Experience Report - EDU 998

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Dates of Field Experiences: June 9 & 11, 2015

Part I: General Observation

Background Information

As a part of a district wide initiative, with support from the Education Technology Department and teachers, students have been developing their very own digital portfolios. A major portion of the support from the Education Technology Department surrounds the creation of accounts, technology support on the online tools as well as in the form of lesson plan updates that integrate technology to further create digital portfolio worthy entries. Also by way of background, at the Groton-Dunstable Regional Middle School, where the field experience occurred, on June 1, 2015, an update to the student handbook allowed students to bring in their own mobile devices, including smart-phones, laptops and tablets. The field experience took place in a classroom setting where the teacher had fully adopted this update, allowing mobile devices from home to be allowed during the field experience. Finally, with a very small population of English Language Learners (ELL), it was difficult to schedule a meaningful time with just ELL students. The field experience I've captured in the classroom environment varies greatly from state averages and places the field experience in a different light than other districts, with a higher ELL populations.

1. What were the objectives of the lesson with which you assisted student(s)?

During both visits to this classroom, students were working in small groups, creating technology infused final projects to share their learning and understanding of a recent popular literature novel.

2. What were the students required to do in terms of communication skills?

As a wrap up to the novel, which included various reading assignments and discussion groups during the final trimester of school, students needed to create a project, approved by their teacher, to "show what they know" and to take a deeper dive into a piece of information, relevant to the novel, that they would like to expand on as a group. With the option to add this assignment to their digital portfolio and to use both their own and existing technology, *all* students created technology infused projects.

The products students worked on during this field assignment ran the gamut, ranging from Google Presentations to a movie trailer video using various online tools. Students worked in groups of 3-5 people and were asked to present their project in front of their peers, which again, was very open and accepting of the various mediums students created the project in. Although I was not available to attend the two days students presented their final projects, I heard they did a wonderful job from their teacher.

3. Describe the level of English language acquisition possessed by your student(s) as that relates to listening, speaking, writing and reading. Also describe other characteristics possessed by your student(s) that were a help or a barrier to their acquisition of English (e.g. self-confidence or lack thereof, presence of other exceptional learning needs). It is understood that your perspective related to this question will be limited.

While observing on both occasions, students immediately formed into their groups at the start of class, gathered in a small circle of desks. Students immediately pulled out their technology brought in from home or worked on Google Chromebooks, made available by the school. The setting was very comfortable and quiet and for the end of school, students were very focused.

Some students knew their group task and were off and running, researching, working through issues with very little support, while others shared back and forth commentary on their part of the project and then would work individually. ELL students were engaged and received support from their peers and teachers. One of the ELL students I observed was creating a video and was conversing about the various effects they were adding, looking for group feedback. While speaking, I noted that the ELL students were very comfortable with their level of verbal communication while conversing with their peers, not overly concerned with a word retrieval or a word sounding off here or there.

Each student needed to work on a certain task to complete the presentation and were able to use digital means to communicate via a shared Google Doc, verbally with their group members as well as having access to email their teacher or speak directly with her if a question arose. Although available, I can't confirm that email was used. There were many opportunities to communicate and not all were verbal. It is important for all students, to be provided access to various communication methods during the day. In particular for ELL students, having options available to communicate is helpful.

4. Describe the interaction and communication of 'your' ELL student(s) with, and in comparison to, native English speakers within the same setting. For example, in a classroom setting, where the ELL student(s) as likely as other students to participate in general classroom discussion or activities and complete tasks successfully? Did they and their non-ELL peers appear to easily interact and socialize? Describe your findings and perceptions.

Initially, my perception would be that with technology available, the ELL students may have been more comfortable sending an email to a teacher, working in silence on the task at hand or even just typing a comment in a Google Doc to get a point across. What I noted was that verbally communicating was the chosen method to share and discuss the project details at the group level. There were no opportunities for any of the students to speak in front of the class during small group time, with support from multiple teachers and myself, this made for a comfortable setting for all students, including ELL students. Thinking back to how a typical final assignment may have been completed in years past, an ELL student may have only had the option of reading a paper in front of the class, in a one-size fits all approach. I'm quite positive that presenting, alone, is socially difficult for all students in the seventh grade. For an ELL student not sure or completely comfortable with their language skills, this must have been a large point of concern and fear in years past. Providing all students with a choice and placing them in a group to work and solve issues relating to the project was powerful. The ELL students moved freely between the various communication methods available.

5. Discuss the role played by teachers or other adults in encouraging the participation and interaction as described above. What strategies were used by teachers or facilitators ensure that ELL students were included in activities? In what ways did the teacher(s) convey respect, caring and compassion that was inclusive of all students in the classroom? Is there anything you observed, in terms of the interaction of students and adults, that you might have handled differently? Include at least one specific example to support your response.

After the field experience, I developed a great admiration for the teacher I observed. There was always individual attention and encouragement when needed. Small nudges and support came freely, with many "ah-ha" type moments. On a personal level, something I like to strive for is providing positive reinforcement. In addition to a general "positive" feel on the time aspect on the field assignment, there was ample opportunities to answer questions and have strong discussions with students. The combination of all the support provided during both observations was quite strong, practically on the level a child's caregiver may have provided. Something that stood out to me, was the fact that instead of asking students to put away their iPads or iPhones,

they were encouraged, and trusted, to use those devices and remain on task.

Having once been a seventh grader myself, providing choice conveys respect to each student, to meet them where they are. The technology provided by the school, along with the software, various accounts, and access to personal technology, allowed the students, including our ELL students, to take a break from verbally communicating if they were so inclined. Maybe typing out a response to a group question using a Google Doc during group time is all that was needed, instead of a discussion. Neither was deemed “right or wrong”, so long as progress continued and no concerns were raised. ELL students, although I was unable to ask, may have found the option of communicating multiple ways, to be very helpful.

Part II: Instructional Strategies Applied by the Candidate

1. Briefly describe the instructional goals that formed the basis of your interaction with ‘your’ ELL student(s), as well as each learning activity that served as the vehicle for meeting those goals. Note whether ELL students were participating in the same learning activity as their non-ELL peers, or if they were working on an ‘adapted’ activity.

The purpose behind the educational lessons taking place during my field experience, on a basic level, included working as a team to collaborate both in a physical and digital space. The most important component would be the project assignment being closely tied to the district curriculum, which is aligned to the Massachusetts ELA Frameworks. Reviewing the MA Frameworks under *Reading Standards for Informational Text 6–12*, the scope of the work prior by the entire classroom through the reading and discussion phases of the literature novel, supported the “Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity” for seventh grade students by following that, “by the end of the year, read and comprehend literary nonfiction in the grades 6–8 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.”

After in-depth, close reading of this novel during the trimester, students needed to create a project showcasing “what they know” and their understanding of the novel by researching, writing, creating presentations that included Google Presentations and scripted movies. In the MA Frameworks under *Writing Standards 6-12*, Production and Distribution of Writing, students, by completing the assignment, would, “use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and link to and cite sources as well as to interact and collaborate with others, including linking to and citing sources” among just a few of the standards hit on.

Throughout both visits during the field experiences, all students, including ELL students, were

offered multiple ways to access the content and were also offered choice in how they would present their knowledge to the teacher and their peers.

2. Briefly describe your role in working with the student(s). What kind of assistance and instruction were you called upon to perform? (e.g., verbal, written, or visual explanations, or translation assistance, general encouragement, correction of or teaching oral or written language skills or vocabulary, giving alternate strategies for solving a problem, other).

As the district director of technology, my visits were supportive of the underlying lesson through the proper use of technology. I was able to share ideas and nudges to all students to support their group project by offering verbal suggestions, online resources and general encouragement. On a few occasions, I corrected grammatical and spelling errors while reviewing various points of the project. There were also a opportunities I was able to suggest alternative technology tools, that allowed for some fun dialogue and to learn alongside the students.

3. Consider the overall success of your instructional interaction with your student(s). What strategies from your current teaching 'repertoire' were useful to you? What were the challenges? Do you believe that you helped 'your' student(s) in some way toward reaching instructional goals? In retrospect, what might you have done differently?

Overall, especially when considering how close this was towards the end of school, I think the lesson created by the classroom teacher and the support I provided was a great combination and balance. Students were engaged and motivated by the options and choice they had been offered for the final project. There was plenty of time to discuss questions and provide support during the field experience. To be honest, I'm not sure I could have or would have changed much in my support role.

Part III: Reflection on Dispositions - Fictional Case Study

Example of fictional case study

Anada "Joseph" Perpa is a nine-year old boy from Phuket, Thailand with very little English language skills and arrived just recently to the USA. He has enrolled in a Charter school in Charterville, Massachusetts, which is a high performing district without another ELL student. Perpa's parents had planned on sending Joseph to the Smith Street School, the local public school, down the road, but they want the best for their son, and with the charter school ranked higher than Smith Street School on a website they came across, so they placed him in the lottery

at the charter school.

At first, Joseph wasn't selected in the lottery, and attended Smith Street. The public district didn't have any any ELL teachers that could understand or work in supporting Joseph's native language of Thai. However, administration at Smith Street and at the district level wanted the best for Joseph and hired an ELL teacher, fluent in Thai and Spanish that could support Joseph and a host of other students. During the first month on the job, Joseph's parents received a call that because of a recent student leaving, a spot at the charter school opened up. Joseph's parents jumped at this opportunity.

Joseph has now been in the country for only four months and has already attended two-schools. After filling out the paperwork to attend the charter school, Joseph's parents assume that Joseph will receive the best teacher possible, capable of supporting his English language acquisition. However, the charter school lacks the proper funds and now can't justify the expenditure, seeing as they only have a single ELL student in the entire school. The charter administration decide to support Joseph with a paraprofessional aide, with no knowledge of the Thai language or any other experience like this to draw on.

Joseph is a bright child and is having a hard time socializing and fitting in. As the only child in the school unable to speak English and not receiving the proper ELL support, he begins to fall behind considerably in academics. The classroom teacher is in her third year and is very talented and continues to receive the neediest students. This is very concerning to her, but she is a young, hard working teacher and supports Joseph as best she can with the assistance of the paraprofessional.

1. Without tenure, Joseph's classroom teacher has her summative evaluation coming up and her students have not shown the type of growth the charter administration would like to see. The teacher isn't receiving the type of support needed from administration and in this particular care, could use an ELL teacher to support Joseph and for the teacher to bounce ideas off of and to have a formal strategy. What is a non-tenured teacher to do when they do not receive the proper support in the classroom for students in need and their job depends on it?
2. Is it acceptable that a paraprofessional was hired to support a needy ELL student? Further with the understanding that at the public school, with larger budgets, hiring an ELL teacher simply isn't as big a burden financially to the district as the charter school, which prior to Joseph's arrival, didn't have a single ELL student and is now tasked with providing

a free and appropriate public education, but funding the ELL position may spell financial disaster?