

## **Early Fieldwork**

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I have been supervising early field experiences for almost 20 years. It is my experience fieldwork unattached to either course or seminar becomes a floating microcosm in students' lives. Seminars and courses ground the experiences. Journals provide a vehicle for synthesizing what is observed, while discussions are invaluable for expressing new found views of schools, teachers, classrooms, students. But, how do we, as busy professors, provide the structure for this? This chapter will look at building a relationship with the local school districts, middle schools, program accreditation documentation, committees, activities, learning experiences, and evaluations. These are important subjects because they will provide the foundation which allows the teacher candidate in early fieldwork to transition successfully from an engaged student to a professional middle level teacher.

The early fieldwork experiences addressed here will be three (3) practica which are indirectly linked to course work. These are:

- junior year first semester 30 hour practicum
- junior year second semester 30 hour practicum
- first semester senior year 40 hour practicum.

These non-course linked practica add up to 100 hours of early fieldwork experiences. The setting is a small liberal arts college with fewer than 100 teacher candidates each year. Middle level students at this college are certified in two areas from mathematics, science, English,

and/or social studies. Their practica are divided so they have at least one experience in each subject concentration setting.

### ***Coordination with school districts***

Coordinating fieldwork placements between IHE and public school classrooms is one of the first steps involved in the fieldwork process. My college collaborates with two districts which are approximately 20 minutes from campus. Each district requires entirely different placement processes. Thus, maintaining a strong working relationship with them requires organization and flexibility. For example, one district requires collaboration with the school district administrator to identify placement requests and due dates and all communication is filtered through the district's main administrative office. For this district, fieldwork requests are compiled which include school, grade, and subject. Together with the district administrator, due dates are identified; I meet with the administrator in her office and present the list of placement requests. The requests are balanced so I am asking for the same number of placements at each school. During the meeting, we discuss the requests. The district administrator then contacts the school principals. After discussion between the district administrator and principal, the principal decides, sometimes in collaboration with teachers, who will have a fieldwork student in their classroom during the following semester.

The other school district has a different placement process. This district requires the college contact each school principal individually via telephone and e-mail to request placements for students. Then each school principal discusses fieldwork placements with classroom teachers.

The actual classroom placements are created when we again contact the principal for the actual placements or the school secretary contacts us.

In either process, the college's involvement in which classrooms teacher candidate fieldwork takes place is limited to subject and grade.

### ***Fieldwork Committee***

The unifying factor between the college and these two school districts is the Fieldwork Committee. This working committee has representatives from both districts: elementary teachers, middle level teachers, high school teachers, elementary principals, high school principals and me. All of the teachers and administrators have had extensive experiences with practicum students. This college's early fieldwork committee is comprised entirely of school administrators or teachers who have had a practicum student in the classroom. These teachers are known as "classroom faculty."

The Fieldwork Committee meets in late April during the school day and plans to add an additional October meeting to its schedule. The Education Department has a budget for this committee which pays for substitute teachers, drinks, and food. The Fieldwork Committee has several tasks. Members serve as liaisons between the college and the schools. Classroom teachers with questions or concerns can ask the committee members who serve as Fieldwork representatives for both administrators and teachers. These representatives bring school or teachers issues to the attention of the whole group. Finally, the committee addresses and

creates the Practicum Activity Checklist. This Checklist gives directions to teachers and students during periods of inactivity. For example, professors link theory and practice in their courses by teaching pedagogy and then assigning an activity to the students. This activity is to be carried out in the practicum classroom. Teacher candidates are required to attend 30 or 40 hours per semester in the practicum classroom. The Practicum Activity Checklist guides experiences beyond course-linked assignments such as creating a bulletin board, grading quizzes or tests, tutoring, and teaching a lesson.

### ***Early fieldwork activities and the Fieldwork Committee***

The Practicum Activity Checklist has become another unifying factor between districts, elementary, middle, and high schools. This checklist specifies what the teachers and administrators on the Fieldwork Committee believe teacher candidates should accomplish during their early fieldwork experiences. The teachers on the Fieldwork Committee believe teacher candidates should experience everything once during the first practicum and multiple times during subsequent practica. In practice, I have found variance between classroom teachers in terms of how closely they choose to follow the Checklist. Some teachers like the Checklist's structure and others do not find it to be realistic. How the Checklist is used, the items on it, teacher comments, and expectations are an agenda item each time the Fieldwork Committee meets.

Following is the Practicum Activity Checklist designed by the Fieldwork Committee and used by the school-based faculty.

## Practicum Activity Checklist

Teacher Candidate \_\_\_\_\_

Practicum I II III

School Based Clinical Faculty \_\_\_\_\_ Dates \_\_\_\_\_

<b>APS 2: Short Range Planning</b>	Yes	No
Create a lesson objective in collaboration with your teacher		
Write a lesson plan		
Teach a lesson to an individual		
Teach a lesson to a small group		
Teach a lesson to the whole class		
<b>APS 3: Planning Assessments and Using Data</b>		
Grade tests		
Grade quizzes		
Record grades and use software when appropriate		
Create a quiz after material is re-taught		
Analyze test data, give to teacher, make recommendations for future lessons		
<b>APS 5: Using Instructional Strategies to facilitate learning</b>		
<b>Teacher candidate taught lessons that:</b>		
Use appropriate instructional strategies		
Use a variety of instructional strategies		
Use instructional strategies effectively		
<b>APS 6: Provide Content</b>		
Demonstrate a thorough command of the subject matter		
Provide appropriate content		
<b>APS 7: Monitoring, Assessing, and Enhancing Learning</b>		
Administer a quiz		
Administer a test		
Monitor student learning		
<b>APS 8: Maintaining an Environment that Promotes learning</b>		
Create a learning bulletin board or learning center		
<b>APS 9: Managing the Classroom</b>		
Manage behavior appropriately		
Make maximum use of instructional time		

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### ***Introductions***

Both the college and the school personnel recognize the importance of teacher candidates having a good start in their fieldwork. This entails knowing the school, its policies, and developing an effective relationship with school administrators and the classroom teacher. For this reason, another issue the Fieldwork Committee addresses is the introduction of the teacher candidate to the school. The administrators on the committee believe a meeting should be organized between principals and teacher candidates before the beginning of the first practicum. It is an opportunity for the principal to explain expectations for a guest in the school, and introduce teacher candidates to classroom teachers. Again there is a great deal of variability concerning how individual principals react to this request. Generally principals with school-specific set of structured rules, regulations, and visitor expectations are willing to host a pre-practicum meeting. Others are less eager to do so. The principals generally expect the college to prepare the teacher candidates to be a school visitor in terms of dress, confidentiality, parking, activities, sign in and out of school policies, name tags, etc.

### ***Communication between the college, teachers, principals***

Once the school principals have identified classroom teachers and communicated the information, the classroom teacher is provided with a folder which contains introductory information about the middle school teacher candidate: majors, hobbies, home town, etc. In many cases sharing this information has led to the middle school student having a fieldwork experience in both certification areas in one semester. It is always a successful tool leading to a personal communication between the school faculty and the teacher candidate. The folder also contains the course syllabus, an introductory letter with contact information, names of

Fieldwork Committee members, the Practicum Activity Checklist, and specific Practicum expectations. These folders are brought to each school at the beginning of the semester and include evaluation forms for the end of the semester. This provides a chance to interact with principals, counselors, teachers, and students. School personnel receive small gifts to acknowledge the time they have spent re-explaining dress codes, parking spaces, or the sign-in machine.

### **Teacher Candidates Value Young Adolescents and are Prepared to Teach Them**

We continue to require middle level majors to have two areas of concentration. Because practica are divided into three distinct semesters, settings, and schools – it is relatively easy to place students in different subject areas. A spread sheet is the key organizer. Each practica request is made in a different subject concentration.

During the fieldwork experience, teacher candidates attend a seminar. They complete written reflections and other assignments designed to introduce them to the young adolescent as well as prepare them to teach the young adolescent. Seminars which focus on articles, reflections and classroom issues help the teacher candidate understand and react to the young adolescent. The middle level teacher candidates are also completing course work during all of their practica. These courses contribute to their knowledge of the theories and research concerning young adolescent development. The middle level teacher candidate completes the middle level reading and writing course, materials and methods of teaching in the middle school, philosophy and organization of the middle school, and the Education Diversity Capstone, adolescent psychology, educational psychology.

The following list depicts a few of the courses and activities which prepare the teacher candidate for teaching the young adolescent:

Development of the Young Adolescent Knowledge of the Young adolescent:

- Adolescent Psychology
- Philosophy and Organization of the Middle School
- Reading and Writing in the Middle School

Activities:

- Case study
- Vignettes
- Novels about young adolescent experiences
- Shadowing

Teaching the Young Adolescent

- Education Psychology
- Materials and methods of teaching in the Middle School
- Reading and Writing in the Middle School
- Philosophy and Organization of the Middle School

Activities:

- Teacher Work Sample
- Tutoring
- Reading pedagogy
- Reflections
- Theories and research

Two practices have consistently helped teacher candidates in their efforts to value and understand the young adolescent. The first practice centers on ample structured discussions and reflections about their fieldwork observations. The second practice is reading, discussion, and written reflections concerning novels which concern young adolescent issues. The novels used include:

- Anderson, Laurie Halse. (2001). *Speak*. New York: Puffin.
- Anonymous. (1971). *Go Ask Alice*. New York: Avon.
- McCormick, Patricia. (2002). *Cut*. New York: PUSH.

- Perlstein, Linda. (2008). *Not Much Just Chillin' The Hidden Lives of Middle Schoolers*. Paw Prints.
- Van Draanen Wendelin. (2003). *Flipped*. New York: Knopf.

The teacher candidates read the novels as part of the course requirements in Middle Level Philosophy and Organization. The issues of adult/young adolescent relationships, sexual issues, drug issues, and communication are covered in this range of books. An important topic during the reflection and discussion period concerns what teachers did in the novels to help the young adolescent and what the teacher could have done to serve as an advocate for the young adolescent. Other questions addressed are: How important are teachers in the lives of young adolescents? What roles do they play in guiding and influencing the young adolescent?

Teacher candidates are usually surprised by how important teachers are in identifying issues of young adolescence and by the teacher's critical role as an advocate for the young adolescent.

***Teacher candidates are committed to and knowledgeable about this age group, education, research, and best practices.***

Early fieldwork has been invaluable as a vehicle for exposing middle level teacher candidates to the variety of developmental and academic levels found in middle schools. Their consistent exclamations center on the variety found in this age group of young adolescents. They are surprised by the variations in the physical size – from short and child-like to tall and adult-like. The emotional ups and down inherent in the young adolescent are also new to the candidates.

Early fieldwork experiences often lead to ideas and questions the teacher candidate would like to explore. The opportunity for this exploration occurs during the Education capstone. This

research course is taken during the teacher candidate's second or third practicum and requires an in-depth look at a topic of interest to the candidate. Teacher candidates' research has included:

- An in-depth study of exploratory pedagogy in middle school science
- Alternative lifestyles in middle school
- Middle level bullying and cliques

Teacher candidate knowledge and commitment to middle level students and their education is also verified through each practicum's final evaluation. The classroom teacher completes this form. Some questions which address this issue include:

- Knowledge of the young adolescent
- Age appropriate lessons

### ***Learning experiences***

Early fieldwork is the vehicle for moving course theory to practice. It begins the process whereby teacher candidates bring together what they are studying in their college courses about adolescent development, pedagogy, curriculum, and middle schools. The teacher candidate's observations and reflections change throughout the three fieldwork placements as they observe and interact with young adolescents who are developing and changing socially, emotionally, and intellectually. In the first days and weeks of the first early field experience, teacher candidates are wide-eyed and excited about being an observer and teacher assistant. Gradually the candidates begin to notice young adolescents who disrupt class, engage in social drama, and students who don't seem to like school. These observations offer wonderful opportunities for relating their findings to their college courses regarding adolescent psychology, behavior management, and motivation.

Later the teacher candidates become intrigued by young adolescents who struggle with academics or who excel in them. This offers an opportunity to begin tutoring projects, planning, and teaching lessons.

In addition to journal reflections and discussions, fieldwork seminars also target current issues in the schools. These issues tend to be policies and regulations. Included in the discussions were the state implementation of EEDA, health laws, vouchers, magnet schools, and budgets. The students formed groups, researched their topic, and presented their findings to their peers. The candidates were able to explain regulations and budget issues which explained how and why young adolescents are grouped, career clusters, teaming and class size.

### ***Assessment of early fieldwork experiences***

Evaluations of the early fieldwork experiences are quantitative, qualitative, formative and summative. The methods of evaluating the teacher candidate and the program each semester include the following:

- Preparedness Survey
- Diversity Survey
- Internship Survey
- Teacher Candidate Evaluation of School Faculty
- Teacher Candidate of Fieldwork and Seminars
- School Faculty Evaluation of Teacher Candidate
- School Faculty Evaluation of Fieldwork
- Seminars
- Mid-point Communication with School Faculty
- Final Conference

Three surveys are given at the beginning and end of each semester. They are the Preparedness Survey, the Diversity Survey, and the Internship Survey. Each asks the students to rate their ability level on a scale of four. The Preparedness Survey targets the candidate's comfort areas in teaching students of various demographics and abilities. The Diversity Survey uses the same four point rating scale and asks candidates to respond to questions about diversity in classrooms, schools, and society. The Internship Survey asks the candidate to assess their skills in working with others, teamwork, communication, initiative, and problem-solving techniques.

At the end of the semester practicum, candidates also evaluate the school faculty, over all fieldwork experience, and the seminars. The school faculty evaluates the fieldwork organization and the teacher candidate.

Formative assessment is important during early fieldwork because it guides the candidate toward activities and choices which lead to success. During seminars, candidates discuss their observations and reactions in the classroom. Subsequent discussion leads to their understandings of policies, roles, regulations, etc. Mid-point communication with the classroom teacher (school faculty) is also extremely important. This communication clarifies whether the teacher candidates are fulfilling their duties in a timely and organized manner. This also allows the candidate to receive guidance toward better habits which will lead to further success.

Teacher candidate knowledge and commitment to middle level students and their education is assessed through the final evaluation completed by the classroom teacher. This final evaluation form is derived from the State's teacher evaluation system and also from the evaluations forms used during student teaching. This alignment leads to clarity of important points and consistency in types and forms of evaluations of the candidates throughout the teacher education program.

The final conference sums up the experience. This conference is scheduled a few weeks in advance between the supervisor and the candidate. At this time, the candidate completes the surveys and I discuss the classroom faculty's evaluation of the candidate's performance over the semester.

### ***Conclusion***

In conclusion early fieldwork experiences provide assurance to the college student they do indeed want to continue as a teacher candidate. In other cases, it helps the college student to decide against working with schools and young adolescents and to find another major.

Early fieldwork connects pedagogy to theory. Mentors guide, seminars and courses provide the place for connecting issues, thoughts, reflections. Early fieldwork requires coordination with schools and teachers – and provides a learning opportunity which can't be replaced on the college campus.