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Innovations in the Pursuit of Excellence

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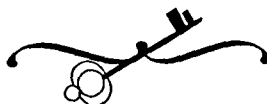
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Reading in Virginia

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Innovations in the Pursuit of Excellence

As students begin their journey in preservice early education courses, an important aspect of an introductory level course is the microteaching experience. For the purposes of this article microteaching is defined as the opportunity to present a lesson to a group of peers who role-play as children at the primary level. Although field-based teaching is critical to a student's educational experience before student teaching the microteaching experience can be a valuable tool for reflecting and evaluating on best instruction. In the process of evaluating practice it became apparent that we might also assess communication competence as well. The Foundations of Early Education course with a microteaching component presented an innovative to appraise the scope of each student's attention to articulate speech. A collaborative effort between the university's speech center and the Education department was established. Instruments for faculty and peer evaluation were designed or adjusted to suit the course framework. Our findings correlated to the results of prior studies of across-the-curriculum college programs with a speech communication emphasis where method and manner of approach are meeting particular success in fields and coursework outside departments of speech communication (Cronin and Tony, 1991 & Weiss, 1989). We found evidence of this same kind of success in the positive feedback from students enrolled in the Foundation of Early Education course. Student evaluations of this course have shown us that an approach employing several means of oral communication assessment was considered by students to be most beneficial. Components of this combined approach and the procedures necessary to effectively incorporate it are described below.

METHOD

Approximately two months prior to the beginning of the semester, the education professor and speech center director met and sought to determine who from among the staff of student speech consultants would be particularly well-suited to serve as a "speech fellow" for the course. The designated fellow was assigned to that professor and that particular class for the upcoming semester. The fellow met with professor and speech center director, and together they reviewed the goals, expectations, and responsibilities for this speech-intensive course component, and assigned deadlines to each segment.

Class enrollment in this introductory course in elementary education was capped at 20 students (mostly sophomore education majors/minors). A 50-minute class period format was chosen, as it can easily accommodate the two required 20-minute microteaching sessions which ground the speech-intensive nature of the course. Hence, about six weeks of the semester are devoted to student involvement in microteaching. The microteaching assignment involves creating a lesson plan for a guided reading experience that is particularly appropriate for kindergarten or first grade. As part of the lesson plan, these pre-service students developed an activity that engages classmates (who are role-playing elementary age students) in a follow-up activity appropriate for the book each has chosen to share.

To accommodate the microteaching experiences, adjustments in course design needed to be made to course content. This was accomplished by truncating and combining the topics (of growth and development of the young child so that issues related to development as it relates to teaching were covered knowing that

students would be required to take a separate course entitled Human Growth and Development) to allow for in-class microteaching time. Student comments suggest the abbreviations of dealing with child development were worthwhile, as they provide students with valuable opportunities to view and critique their peers and assimilate ideas that would be useful in their own teaching experiences.

At the end of the semester, the speech fellow submitted to the faculty member and to the speech center director a summary appraisal of the speech-intensive component of the course, including suggestions for improvement. Students enrolled in the course were also asked to evaluate the speech-intensive component in the lesson simulation. Students generally approved of the varied assessment techniques: the videotaping and review, the peer evaluations, and the student fellow's assessment. The highest ratings, according to our data, were for the use of these methods in combination, allowing multiple sources of feedback. Subsequent experimentation with this approach might well include a formal self-assessment component using an appropriately designed self-reporting instrument.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that there were trade-offs in terms of class time devoted to this lesson simulation exercise. It was found that when we closely scrutinized the syllabus we found a place where we could curtail the work on young children's development knowing that this information would be covered extensively in another course. However, we did not forgo the topic altogether; we altered how we dealt with the topic to allow more time for microteaching. (If necessary, the microteaching assignment could occur outside of class time.) However, we found that it effectively sets the tone for the seriousness of preparing and executing a lesson with precision. Students gain from seeing a wide variety of lesson presentations and styles of teaching.

When students are viewing the lesson via close-circuit television, the commentary offered in the viewing room as the lesson unfolds helps students to analyze that factors enrich or detract from the teaching and learning exercise presented in the lesson simulation. Not only is this valuable class-time component; there is a supplemental benefit in the personal evaluation major and education minor, and who is, therefore, familiar with both course content and the communication skills essential to this situation.

Institutions without a speech center or trained speech consultants could still use this approach. A senior speech communication major selected by the faculty and working with the guidance of a specific faculty member might be used in a place of a speech consultant, and a set of classroom television monitors in adjoining rooms might be connected through the use of relatively inexpensive cables.

We believe that this approach effectively teaches undergraduate students that course content and articulate speech go hand in hand. The method described is a learning-by-doing approach, which, in instances such as these, has proven convincingly effective.

NOTES

¹McKeachie, W. (1994). *Teaching Tips*. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co. 171-172. A brief description of microteaching under the heading of simulated instruction is presented based on research conducted by G.O.M Leith (1982) "The influence of personality on learning to teach: Effects and delayed effects of microteaching." *Educational Review*, (34) 3, 195-204.

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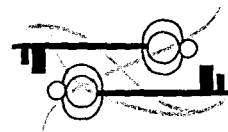
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Summary Appraisal of the Speech-Intensive Component Guided Reading Evaluation Form

Teacher/Presenter: _____

Evaluator: _____

*Please assign the appropriate score for each category:

- Exceeds Expectation
Meets Expectation
Needs Improvement

CONTENT ASPECS

PRESENTATION ASPECS

INTRODUCTION: <input type="checkbox"/> Captivating attention grabber <input type="checkbox"/> Motive for listening <input type="checkbox"/> Highlights title, author, illustrator	LANGUAGE & SPEECH ELEMENTS: <input type="checkbox"/> Clearly explains/defines difficult terms (i.e.; illustrator) <input type="checkbox"/> Uses vocabulary appropriate to grade level <input type="checkbox"/> Uses appropriate rate (speed) <input type="checkbox"/> Uses appropriate volume <input type="checkbox"/> Variety in pitch/ voice illustration <input type="checkbox"/> Clearly pronounces/articulates
BOOK READING: <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage predictions/ask questions <input type="checkbox"/> Uses story elements effectively <input type="checkbox"/> Gives attention to illustrations <input type="checkbox"/> Gives attention to written text <input type="checkbox"/> Incorporates choral reading	BODY MOVEMENTS: <input type="checkbox"/> Uses pointer effectively during book reading <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates good posture <input type="checkbox"/> Gestures compliment presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Animated facial expressions
ACTIVITY: <input type="checkbox"/> Clearly connects to book reading <input type="checkbox"/> Allows students to actively participate <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates creativity (of teacher) <input type="checkbox"/> Stimulates critical thinking <input type="checkbox"/> Possesses education value	SPEAKER CREDIBILITY: <input type="checkbox"/> Proper dress for presentation <input type="checkbox"/> Eye contact <input type="checkbox"/> Appears knowledgeable of topic <input type="checkbox"/> Demonstrates enthusiasm and interest in the topic <input type="checkbox"/> Appropriately conveys mood & emotion
CONCLUSION: <input type="checkbox"/> Reviews lesson and/or educational value appropriately <input type="checkbox"/> Ties up lesson (doesn't leave hanging) <input type="checkbox"/> Encourages students to share or practice what they've learned	VISUAL AIDS: <input type="checkbox"/> Book clearly seen and handled correctly (page turning, showing pictures, etc). <input type="checkbox"/> Visual aids colorful <input type="checkbox"/> Visual aids appropriate size and readability

Comments: