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Field Experience Reimagined: Integrating Microteaches to Foster Preservice Teachers' Self-Efficacy

By Jennifer Lemke, Andrea Karpf, Paula Jakopovic, and Sheryl McGlamery

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on teacher preparation programs. With field experiences being among the most effective pathways to connect theory to practice and contributing significantly to preservice teachers' self-efficacy development, teacher preparation programs have had to reimagine these experiences. In this article, the authors share how their teacher preparation program incorporated microteaches to continue fostering self-efficacy during pandemic times and the potential implications of these programmatic adaptations.

An important goal of teacher preparation programs is to find ways to connect theory with classroom application. Among the most effective bridges to connect the two are field experience opportunities (Emerson et al., 2018). To maximize the value of field experiences for preservice teachers, instructional teams must ensure these are meaningful. This requires instructors in teacher preparation programs to have a shared vision of effective teaching practices, to model these practices throughout program courses, and to have clear standards that connect coursework and field experiences (Darling-Hammond, 2014).

Boyd et al. (2009) found that field-based opportunities and experiences are the most predictive indicators of teachers' success in their first years. They serve as a way for preservice teachers to apply coursework content in classrooms and to build confidence in their delivery of instruction. A preservice teacher's confidence connects to the concept of self-efficacy, which Bandura (1997) defined as the "...beliefs in one's capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p. 3). Bandura recognized four main sources of efficacy: mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and physiological arousal. Mastery experiences are the hands-on teaching moments in which preservice teachers can see their successes and failures with planning and implementing lessons. Such experiences are considered the most powerful source for a preservice teacher's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Verbal persuasion refers to the process of receiving meaningful feedback from a reliable source. Vicarious experiences are opportunities in which preservice teachers can imagine themselves teaching or having the opportunity to observe another person participate in the teaching process (Clark & Newberry, 2019). Finally, physiological arousal is the emotional connection made to the teaching experience, which can influence a person's perception of his or her own performance (Howardson & Behrend, 2015).

Bandura (1997) found that self-efficacy can be more powerful than one's ability to execute a task. Tschannen-Moran and Johnson (2011) recognized the connection between motivation and confidence and ascertained "...self-efficacy beliefs can therefore become self-fulfilling prophecies validating either beliefs of capabilities or of incompetence" (p. 751). Therefore, the significance of a preservice teacher's sense of being capable of delivering instruction cannot be overstated and further stresses the importance of building self-efficacy during field experiences.



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Knowing that field experiences develop self-efficacy in preservice teachers, the authors of this article, who are members of a university teacher preparation instructional team, sought to find ways to continue to create meaningful opportunities during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the following sections, we share how our teacher preparation program continued to foster self-efficacy during pandemic times and share the potential implications of these programmatic adaptations.

Structures for Building Self-Efficacy in Preservice Teachers

Self-Efficacy Pre-Pandemic

The authors are faculty members in a preservice teacher preparation program at a mid-sized urban university in the midwest of the United States. Prior to the pandemic, our instructional team collaborated each semester to facilitate 40 hours of supervised field experience for our preservice teachers. These traditional field experiences take place in a local urban school district and provide opportunities for our preservice teachers (henceforth referred to as “students”) to work with diverse student populations. During their 6 weeks in the field, our students typically create and implement multiple planned interactions that ensure they have ample opportunities to engage in mastery experiences and receive feedback regarding their teaching from instructors, instructional coaches, and their mentor teachers. Our goal with this process is to ensure our students can identify strengths and areas of growth early in order to help increase their competence and self-efficacy over time.

Although providing mastery experiences is perhaps the main goal of our field experience, we also recognize that verbal persuasion, or feedback, is crucial to nurture the development of our students’ pedagogical practice (Bandura, 1997; Mulholland & Wallace, 2001). Students receive feedback from instructors and coaches on both their written and enacted plans throughout the field experience. The verbal persuasion is amplified because each student is provided opportunities to receive feedback from a variety of sources who bring unique lenses of expertise to support the improvement of our students’ praxis as an integral component of building self-efficacy.

We recognize that vicarious experiences also increase a preservice teacher’s self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Clark & Newberry, 2019). Preservice teachers can build their “teacher toolkit” by observing others teach. In our field experience, we embed several supports intended to scaffold the learning experiences of our students and offer vicarious learning opportunities. Our students are typically paired in classrooms, affording them opportunities to observe both their mentor teacher and practicum partner as they deliver lessons. Through these vicarious encounters, students are afforded additional insights into examples of effective strategies for teaching, classroom management, and even relationship-building with students that can offer them new approaches to add to their own practice.

Teaching is often seen as a personal process and developing confidence in one’s teaching abilities can take time. The setup of our field experiences provides a structured environment for our students to explore and implement teaching and management strategies in a space where they can receive support from their instructors, mentors, and coaches each step of the way. This can help them learn to manage emotions such as stress and anxiety about teaching and remove the physiological barriers that exist in their development and learning (d’Alessio, 2018).

Each of the components of our field experience was established with the

development of our students' praxis and self-efficacy in mind. In the peak of the pandemic, our local public school partners shifted to a hybrid classroom model in which approximately half of the students attended class in person while the rest logged in remotely. With social distancing and room capacity restrictions in place, we had to develop creative alternate opportunities for our students to engage in teaching opportunities and find ways to provide targeted feedback. As such, our instructional team explored the idea of implementing microteaches to supplement the reduced time in field. A microteach is a lesson taught in front of peers for the purpose of practice and peer review, including written feedback. In our program, the microteach was also observed by an instructor who provided additional written feedback.

Shifting the Structure Mid-Pandemic

In fall 2020, our instructional team decided to facilitate five microteaching opportunities spread across the 6-week field experience. In these opportunities, students facilitated a portion of a planned lesson to a group of peers and received feedback from both an instructor and the peer group. Our team selected each week's topic to ensure students engaged in similar concepts and disciplines while allowing each student the choice of grade level and targeted learning objective for his or her plan.

Our teacher preparation program uses the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) performance standards to guide instructors' observations and feedback as they evaluate each student's overall performance during the practicum experience (Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2013). These standards, constructed by the CCSSO, outline what teachers should know and be able to do to ensure all PK–12 students reach their potential and are college and career ready. With an awareness that our students had limited mastery experiences within which to demonstrate these competencies during the condensed practicum experience, we focused each microteach on a different performance standard. Students facilitated opportunities for their peers to engage with the learning objective during 15-minute microteach presentations. While each student presented, his or her small group of peers actively participated as learners and took notes to assist in providing meaningful feedback to the presenter at the conclusion of the microteach. After each presentation, both the instructor and participating peers offered targeted feedback. We encouraged each participant to provide both positive and constructive feedback centered on the designated performance standard. Although peers provided solely verbal feedback, the instructors gave both oral and written feedback. After the reflective conversation, each student also engaged in self-reflection, documenting aspects of the lesson that went well, identifying things to consider, and setting a goal for moving forward.

Reactions to the Initial Implementation

At the close of the semester, we asked students to complete a written reflection about the microteach experience and interviewed each of the instructors to examine what worked well and to solicit areas for improvement. Students and instructors both identified varied aspects of the microteach experiences that were beneficial.

Both students and instructors agreed that mastery experiences to engage in targeted practice planning for and implementing the InTASC standards (CCSSO, 2013) was beneficial. Both groups pointed out that these opportunities resulted



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in improvements in teacher presence. Specifically, many students identified the microteach environment as a safe space for them to practice the implementation process and develop confidence in delivering instruction. As one student shared, “I think the microteaches were beneficial by allowing me to practice in a safe environment even though I was graded. I would rather mess up and fix it there than in the classroom and hurt student learning.” This supportive environment played an important role in the development of students’ self-efficacy.

Students and instructors also agreed that microteaches provided beneficial chances for preservice teachers to experience varied approaches to modeling and teaching content, as well as to see different resources and tools available to support teaching and learning. These vicarious experiences offered students access to a wide range of lessons that varied in content, instructional strategies, and delivery. For example, one student shared,

The microteaches also gave me a lot of new ideas. In field, I taught only reading lessons and so from the microteaches I was able to take away different ways to teach predicting, making connections, etc., and then include those in my future lessons.

These experiences allowed our students to diversify their instructional toolkits as they planned and prepared for future lessons.

Initial Implementation Challenges

Although students and instructors alike identified benefits of the microteaches, the experience also included challenges. One such challenge was simulating an environment similar to an elementary classroom. Although peers took part in the lesson and played the roles of the students, the “teachers” were not faced with the same problems of classroom management or differences in student understanding that they would experience in an actual classroom environment. One student shared he or she “...never once had to use classroom management” when teaching a group of peers. Another stated, “The on-campus microteachings...did not impact my performance too much in field, as I did not teach any of the microteaching lessons in my field experience classroom,” which perhaps decreased the significance of the microteach as a mastery experience. Instructors echoed this same sentiment, recognizing that teaching a group of adults is starkly different from teaching a group of elementary students. One instructor stated,

It is impossible to recreate the actual environment of teaching children in a classroom in any simulated setting. Our students did not have to worry about issues such as classroom management, interruptions, or students who come in with gaps in their background knowledge and understanding.

Another issue noted by both students and instructors was the quality of feedback. Although students appreciated the opportunity to gain insights into what went well and the potential changes they could make, both instructors and students agreed that peers and instructors did not always provide targeted feedback. Instructors believed that the feedback students offered lacked depth, and students shared similar concerns, believing that instructors did not always deliver honest, critical feedback to support them in their growth and development. One student shared,

I wish I had more feedback during the microteaching times. There was only one professor that would provide me with ‘grows’ or things to consider,

whereas the others only provided me with some ‘glows.’ This feedback is vital to me, and I am always wanting to find areas to improve upon. With feedback and verbal persuasion being significant sources of self-efficacy, instructors and students believed more explicit opportunities for feedback were needed.

A logistical concern expressed by both instructors and students was the amount of time and management the microteaches took across the 6 weeks of the field experience. Students expressed concerns with planning and preparing for both practicum lessons and the weekly microteach, while instructors expressed concerns about providing and managing timely feedback each week. Instructors wondered if the expectations of the experience were “too much” to sustain. We reflected on all the concerns raised about the structure and implementation of the microteaches in order to improve the experience the following semester.

Moving Forward: Revising the Implementation of Microteaches

In spring 2021, due to ongoing concerns for safety, our university continued to implement a de-densified approach for on-campus classes and practicums. Using the feedback gathered from the fall semester, our team set forth making both logistical and structural changes to the microteach model. In response to faculty’s and students’ concerns regarding the amount of planning and preparation that went into microteaches, we condensed the experience so that candidates taught and implemented two microteaches. We utilized the same format for these microteaches as in the initial round, but we distributed them across the practicum experience to balance the workload and allow students more time to engage in the planning process. During the weeks that students did not implement microteaches, they participated in both professional learning sessions and instructor-led reflective conferences. The professional learning sessions, facilitated by instructors and local area teacher leaders, provided students with tips, tools, and strategies to enhance their instructional performance. The reflective conferences afforded students the opportunity to debrief a video-recorded practicum lesson with an instructor individually and to engage in the goal-setting process.

Our team also worked in spring 2021 to enhance the opportunities for students to receive meaningful, targeted feedback from both instructors and peers during the microteaches. First, we recruited additional university faculty to assist with the microteaches. This eliminated the burden of the instructor observing two students simultaneously and ensured that every student received specific written and verbal feedback immediately after the lesson. To assist students in providing meaningful feedback, we implemented the use of sentence frames to help students structure their comments. These sentence frames, which provide specific vocabulary and structure for response and discussion (Echevarria, 2016), assisted students in constructing focused feedback that assisted their peers in enhancing specific components of their lessons and instructional performance. Examples of sentence frames included phrases such as “The best aspect of the lesson presented was _____” or “I have the following suggestion to improve _____ aspect of the lesson.” The peer reviewers were encouraged to list and describe two to three areas for improvement and at least one aspect of the lesson that they liked.



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Reactions to the Second Round of Implementation

With the insights and information collected from the second round of student reflections and instructor interviews, both groups expressed that more specific feedback had been provided, making the experience more impactful on students' overall growth and performance. One student shared, "I think having that extra feedback and practice really taught me a lot when conducting lesson plans and that the microteaches provided opportunities to get new ideas and suggestions to implement with elementary students." Another student echoed the value of peer feedback by saying that the microteach experience "...was really valuable for me because [my peers] are all very smart and thought of new ideas I hadn't considered." A third student said, "I was able to adjust my lesson according to the feedback I received while teaching it on campus to my peers," indicating the positive impact the microteach feedback had on lessons he or she had implemented during the field experience. Students' responses collectively displayed the value that verbal persuasion had on their confidence and understanding of effective instructional practices.

Instructors shared that recruiting additional faculty to help facilitate microteaches, along with the use of language frames, may have contributed to students receiving more individualized feedback during microteaches in the second round of implementation. One instructor commented, "I think by us being intentional and providing those language frames to students ahead of time for each microteach, students provided more explicit, meaningful, descriptive feedback for their peers and engaged in that reflective conversation this semester." Both students' and instructors' responses suggested that the adjustments made positively contributed to students' opportunities to receive meaningful feedback.

Students also expressed the value they found in participating in the added professional learning sessions. One student explained that "...the most beneficial parts of professional development days on campus were all of the strategies I learned, the different resources I learned about, and multiple different ways to utilize these resources in the classroom." Another discussed how the professional learning days served as a reflective opportunity. The student shared, "My other favorite part of the professional development days was getting to reflect on our teaching experience. We were learning new information (such as classroom management) and getting to reflect on this knowledge and how we've seen and/or applied it."

Students also found value in the networking opportunities provided through professional learning sessions with teacher leaders from surrounding area schools. One student said, "I loved how we were able to meet with them and get to know them." Both instructors and students appreciated the diverse perspectives and approaches the teacher leaders brought to the professional learning sessions. One student commented that she "...liked how it was people that were not our professors because they provided a different point of view." These vicarious experiences afforded students opportunities to observe and connect with educational leaders and build knowledge and capacity through reflection and discussion.

Another benefit instructors discussed was that the modifications made to the balance of microteaches and professional learning days were more manageable for instructors and students. One of the instructors explained,

I liked the idea of having the microteaches near the beginning of the field experience so that our preservice teachers had more practice opportunities with support before teaching more of their lessons in the classroom. Some

candidates were able to utilize their microteach plans in field, so this provided a sort of dress rehearsal for them where they received immediate feedback and could make adjustments before working with kids.

Students expressed this same belief when sharing things such as “I liked how they weren’t overly stressful. They were simple lessons. I also liked how we had only two; I could see where more could get stressful.” Such comments reaffirmed our decision to decrease the quantity of microteaches in favor of offering other professional learning opportunities to balance the workload while still maximizing the opportunities for our preservice teachers to learn and grow.

Continuing Challenges with Implementation

As with most change, however, came suggestions to continue refining the processes and structures to support the growth of our preservice teachers. For example, one student offered a suggestion about more directly connecting the microteach opportunities to what they were doing in field:

I think during field experience it would be nice to...match our microteach to a standard that we have for that grade, not necessarily what we are doing in that class, but to do something that is on grade level to understand more what they are learning and what level they are expected to be at.

Such a modification could help students more readily translate what they experience and learn from the microteach to teaching practice in their classrooms, making the mastery experience more impactful on their growth and development.

Although it appeared the expectations were more manageable in the second round of implementation, instructors continued to contemplate the appropriate number of microteaches to incorporate in the 6-week experience. Our instructors aimed to maximize chances to engage in both mastery and vicarious experiences while still maintaining a reasonable balance between students’ on-campus and in-classroom teaching expectations. As one instructor reflected,

Overall, holistically... I really saw growth, and I think it was better that we pared down the number of microteaches. However, now that we’ve done it, you know, a second time, I felt like maybe there was probably one too many professional developments, ...and we should add one more microteach and take one professional development away, but again that’s just with how we’re learning and growing with this.

Our students also identified the importance of finding the balance between offering professional development and providing additional teaching opportunities. One student shared,

I loved the microteaches and disliked the [professional learning] day we relearned graphic organizers again. It was a day we all left class and thought it was wasted time. In a semester when every in-classroom experience matters, that day felt like it was wasted.

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Although this was the only negative comment about the professional learning days from the students' perspective, a number of students' reflections about these experiences focused more on the ability to network with peers and district teacher leaders than they did on specific teaching strategies or resources they found valuable.

The Potential Implications of Microteaches Post-Pandemic

Lessons Learned and Future Directions for Our Program

Our initial goal in implementing microteaches during the 2020–2021 academic year was to mitigate the loss of 50% of the hours and opportunities our preservice teachers typically have during their field experience. Traditionally, our practicum is structured in such a way that our students have opportunities to engage in mastery experiences of planning and implementing lessons, to have vicarious experiences observing their mentor and peers teaching, and to receive feedback from instructors, mentors, and instructional coaches. This experience is designed to provide a sheltered, safe space for our students to practice and grow in their teaching praxis. As a result, the structure of the practicum experience is engineered in such a way to help our students increase their self-efficacy as teachers via all four sources of Bandura's (1997) definition of self-efficacy. Pivoting to a hybrid field experience model that incorporated microteaches as an avenue to increase the opportunities for students to engage in teaching and

feedback cycles happened out of necessity, yet our team identified several benefits of utilizing microteaches. In fall 2021, our university transitioned back to full face-to-face instruction, as did our partnering school district. With this shift came the question: What role, if any, do microteaches have in a "normal" practicum experience or in our methods courses? In our examination of participants' responses, we found that, overwhelmingly, students and instructors alike identified elements of the microteaches that supported the development of teacher self-efficacy along all four of Bandura's sources (Jakopovic et al., 2021).

With this in mind, our team made the collective decision to embed one microteach opportunity at the end of our students' first week in their practicum experience in fall 2022, despite returning to our normal 40-hour practicum schedule. We determined that an early opportunity for our students to practice implementing a lesson plan as well as to receive immediate, intentional peer and instructor feedback would be a beneficial way to onboard them to the practicum experience.

Learning from our previous iterations, the instructional team elected to hold the microteach on the final day of the first week of the regularly scheduled practicum block as a day when all instructors and instructional coaches were available to facilitate, observe, and provide feedback. In addition to allowing students to receive their first formal teaching opportunity of the semester, situating the microteach at the start of the field experience offered instructors insights into potential areas of relative strength or concern with candidates so that we could offer opportunities for early intervention as needed.

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Our instructional team has also begun to examine ways in which we can embed some of the structural elements of our microteach design into our individual content methods courses as well. For example, we have identified areas of our courses where we can increase the opportunities for students to engage in mastery experiences via microteaching to their peers (which subsequently can result in vicarious experiences as they observe peer instruction). We have also learned the value of providing scaffolds, such as sentence frames, and of tying teaching practice to the InTASC teaching standards to facilitate meaningful, targeted feedback on these teaching opportunities from peers and instructors. It is our hope that supplementing the typical 6-week block of field experience with some of the new tools and strategies we gained while implementing a hybrid model will afford extended opportunities for our preservice teachers to grow in confidence and teaching competence.

Potential Implications for Other Teacher Preparation Programs

The lessons learned from our reflections on the incorporation of microteaches as an alternative approach to foster self-efficacy in our preservice teachers may be of benefit to other teacher preparation programs beyond our own. As a result, we offer several recommendations for faculty who lead teacher preparation programs and who may be interested in incorporating microteaches. First, it is critical to have clear goals for the implementation of the microteach. What skills, strategies, or teaching standards are preservice teachers practicing and working to master? Identifying this target and unpacking it with them prior to the microteach allows both the teacher and the observer to engage in the experience with the same lens. Preservice teachers are able to craft and implement lessons that focus on a specific element of their praxis, and instructors and peers have a specific goal in mind as they observe so they can offer intentional, meaningful feedback.

Additionally, we recognized that preservice teachers often need to see and experience descriptive feedback modeled so they have an understanding of what constitutes quality, actionable feedback. Preservice teachers can benefit from scaffolds such as sentence frames to help them practice crafting their comments in constructive and supportive ways for peers while still offering candid insights. We also found that providing critical feedback to peers can be uncomfortable at first. Ensuring that students can collaborate regularly with their peers in small groups to garner trust can facilitate their engaging more openly in these types of conversations. Faculty must assess where their preservice teachers are developmentally in terms of their experiences in receiving and giving feedback to ascertain what types of support may best suit their learning needs. Incorporating structures such as this can help facilitate peer feedback that is of high quality.

Finally, our team came to appreciate the types of logistics that go into facilitating microteaches in such a way that maximizes the experience for students. We found it is imperative to keep a small student-to-instructor ratio so that we can fully focus on individual learners. To do so, faculty must examine issues such as the available physical space, timing, and potential methods of capturing evidence of preservice teachers' teaching experiences in order to provide individualized feedback. Intentional organization and planning became an imperative component of our microteach implementation model, and although we offer suggestions here, we recognize that individual teacher preparation programs will need to assess the needs that are specific to their students and models.

Conclusion

We began our work with microteaches as a temporary solution to a problem introduced by the pandemic. What we found, however, is the possibility that this sometimes underutilized approach to developing teaching praxis can also be a valuable way to foster the self-efficacy of preservice teachers. When the right supports are in place and candidates engage in quality over quantity of microteaches, these supplements to field experiences have the potential to influence mastery, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal in a positive way (Bandura, 1986; 1997). As we look to the future, our team plans to continue examining the possible implications these observations may have on the design of teacher preparation programs.

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