Chapter 14

Early and Often Creating and Implementing Performance-Based Field Instruments: For Students in Early Field Experiences

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will examine the process of creating a series of performance-based assessments for an entry level course with a field component. The discussion will include an examination of the purpose of the performance-based assessments for the course, the development of the assessment to address the inherent issues related to course design, the ways in which the faculty members collaborated to create the instruments, the issues related to creating a partnership between the university and the local schools, and an examination of how this process could be better implemented in the future. Additionally, the formative activities and the summative instrument will be presented, deconstructed, and analyzed with the hope that other university programs with early field-based experiences could benefit from its explication and adapt it for use in the field.

INTRODUCTION

There are several issues related to the implementation of performance-based assessments in early field experiences for education majors. First, the assessments need to be pertinent to a wide range of schools spanning from elementary to high school. Additionally, the number of university students placed at a particular school can also hinder the process for enacting the field-based experience. Lastly, not all performance-based assessments are built the same, and efforts to revise the components of the assessment can often be a difficult task for faculty members to undertake while keeping in mind the first two issues. Because early field experiences do not often have field components where university students actually teach in front of a class, it becomes difficult for a professor to assess their potential to work with students.

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Therefore, a broader definition of what performance assessments are needs to be included in the discussion about the importance of these types of assessments. Additionally, in order to facilitate the use of performance-based field assessments in early field experiences, a solid partnership must be formed between the public schools and the university-based programs. These issues can be addressed through the use of a myriad of performance-based assessments that allow the teacher candidate to understand certain conceptualizations related to how children learn.

The objectives for this chapter are to provide:

1. A description of the process and potential issues related to the use of performance-based assessments in local schools.
2. The presentation of the formative activities and summative assessments used.
3. The examination of efforts to use partnerships between teacher education programs and local schools to support the implementation of performance-based assessments.
4. The future directions for the design and implementation of performance-based assessments.

BACKGROUND

The performance-based assessment, as it will be discussed here, includes multiple, formatively graded tasks such as observations, interviews, and other activities related to interactions between the host teacher, student, and university student. University students’ involvement in performance-based assessments is an essential component of their learning process in a teacher education program (Porter et al., 2001; Pecheone & Chung, 2005). Many teacher education programs require that students have a field experience as part of the requirements for a course or the overall completion of a major degree. Therefore, understanding how this process can be facilitated is an important aspect of any teacher education program.

Performance-based assessments can also serve as valuable pieces of information for the faculty of teacher education programs and can be used to determine whether or not students are meeting competencies as set forth by the college and its subsequent governing bodies (Anderson & DeMeulle, 1998). Additionally, teacher candidates who have a deeper understanding of context and are assessed in a more authentic manner are better prepared to face the trials and tribulations in their practice, especially when encountered with challenging situations such as working with students in poverty (Villegas, 1997; Darling-Hammond & Snyder, 2000).

A teacher candidate’s deeper understanding of context is also important when it comes to preparing teachers for a culturally diverse world (Hollins, 1998). The impetus for faculty in a teacher education program should be to expose teacher candidates to different settings, including ones that they might not be familiar with, as it is a far different environment than the one they grew up knowing. The teacher candidates can then draw upon these experiences and provide a better level of empathic understanding for the students they are working with in the public school system.

In addition to providing teachers with a more culturally diverse setting for their field experiences, teacher candidates should also be exposed to multiple methods of assessment through a process of systematic inquiry (Schwab, 1969). At the heart of the process is the systematic collection of data. The teacher candidate should be able to record and analyze what they see in the field in order to make meaning of what is happening to students as they learn. Focusing on certain populations of learners at risk, such as those in poverty is a key component of becoming a teacher and one area that is often overlooked (Jensen, 2009).