

How My Studies Have Prepared Me to Teach

Content and Methodology

By: Meganmarie Pinkerton

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Professor Heather Schilling

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I came to Manchester with a dream, to become an inspiring teacher, who would change the lives of students throughout my teaching career for the better. For this dream to come true I needed tools, training, and heart. I came to Manchester equipped with the drive and desire and some background knowledge of my field through my own experiences as a student and through my parents as teachers. What I needed were the tools and training to take me further and make me into the amazing teacher that I aspired to be. My content and methods courses here at Manchester College have continually been equipping me with the knowledge and experience that I need in my field. I have gained knowledge of theories and practices to incorporate into my own classroom. This knowledge has changed or strengthened my views and attitudes of how a classroom should operate, how theories and practices should be implemented in a classroom and the actual content that should be taught. With all of this insight I continue to tweak my ideas of my “perfect classroom”, and have begun to put my knowledge to use as I practice my profession.

Each of my content classes has filled my brain with information on theories, philosophies, lesson ideas, and best practices. I experienced my first content class as a freshman in my Introduction to Teaching course. Through this course I was, just as it said, introduced to teaching. I studied many well known theorists such as Gardner and Bloom. I gave a group presentation on Urie Bronfenbrenner and his ecological systems theory, discussing the many different environments that affect people. This also provided me with my first opportunity to teach our own class and then test them on what they learned from our presentation. The theorists have followed me throughout my courses, each method or idea has an accompanying theory that has been tested or proven to work. As a student and future teacher, it is up to me to pick out the theories or ideas that best fit my idea of a classroom and how I feel my students will best learn.

My courses have also taught me about children themselves and how they develop and learn. In my Child Development course, I studied the different developmental levels that children go through. I learned which skills students are able to complete and which ones need to be saved for a later age level. Retaining this crucial information enables me to teach lessons and instill knowledge in my students through developmentally appropriate presentations.

Another essential component to creating effective lessons and educational classrooms is the continuing art of assessment which has been especially stressed in my methods block and other recent classes. I have learned the importance of differentiating assessment methods in the classroom so that students of varying abilities have the opportunity to prove their knowledge through multiple effective avenues. Along with this I have learned to study these assessments so that I can analyze my own teaching methods and lesson plans and alter them so that students can obtain the best education possible. Along with assessing within lessons, I have learned different assessment strategies through my mild intervention courses and Literacy Block, to check for disabilities, and students' strengths and weaknesses in different subjects or abilities. In Mild Interventions, and Assessment & Implementation of Mild Interventions, I learned how to administer the Peabody assessment for vocabulary and record observations for behavioral assessments. In Literacy Block we practiced various assessment strategies for students' reading abilities. All of these assessment strategies help me to determine students' levels and the validity of my own teaching techniques and abilities.

Some of my views, knowledge, and attitudes have changed or been strengthened through studies and discussion in my content classes. I came to college with different ideas on best practices and have been continually enhancing and altering these ideas. Some of these ideas have been influenced by courses such as Classroom Management, elementary specials, and Mild

Interventions classes which have built on the ideas of differentiation in my classroom and lessons and utilizing various methods of instruction so as to alter and enhance my original ideas of best practices.

One original “best practice” that quickly became a viewpoint of the past, entailed befriending the students as a form of classroom management. I have since learned various methods of management through my studies which prove otherwise. In Classroom Management, we discussed the importance of gaining respect and providing the student with a feeling of trust yet not giving them complete “friend status”. Students can take advantage of the friendship or make a teacher feel guilty when he or she has to follow through with discipline. It is best that the students understand that as a teacher I will do the best I can to give them the greatest education that I can, and because of that I need to follow through with rules that will help the classroom obtain a healthy learning environment and decrease disruptions.

My views of special education have been strengthened through my Mild Interventions courses. Before college I had very little experience in working with students with disabilities. I have observed hands on, the obstacles that students with disabilities must face in a general education classroom. On that same note, I used to think that student with disabilities learned best in a separate classroom. Through my studies I began to understand that it depends on the students’ abilities and that each student deserves the best learning and least restrictive environment possible. There are constantly accommodations that teachers must make for various students in their classrooms. These accommodations can be met by studying various practices and methods as well as assessing student learning and trying out different ideas until the best options are found.

My idea of how a school day should be run has changed a little as well. I could never understand why some teachers would just give worksheets and stray away from the fun activities or focuses on music, art, PE, and even science and social studies. I have since observed and learned that the school day is much shorter than it would seem and due to the stress on standards some teachers find it hard to fit in those “fun” activities. At the same time I have learned the importance of the “specials” and fun activities in the classroom. In Essential Skills of Music we learned that many students learn better when topics or lessons are associated with music. Through Teaching Fundamental Movement we studied the different physical abilities of students as they develop and the importance of allowing students to move around and get exercise throughout the day. Most students retain information more efficiently if they can complete an activity by moving or through hands on experience. Unfortunately many of these topics are being cut from school curriculum. It is up to us as educators to incorporate all the different topics such as music, art, and PE into our curriculum so students have the opportunity to use their creativity through learning.

One of the most helpful aspects of the education content and methodology courses is the abundance of actual classroom and teaching experiences that we receive through our classes. In Educational Psychology we had the opportunity to work with students through a tutoring program and see what the students were working on and what things they were having trouble with. In our observations for Mild Interventions Strategies, we were able to note which methods were being put into practice to accommodate students in the classroom and skills that were being stressed in the special education pull out classes. My Classroom Management class forced me to focus attention on the discipline plan implemented in my student teaching placement classroom, where I saw examples of Coloroso’s Inner Discipline and Fred Jones’s Bell Ringers. I have also

noticed that time is precious. I could not understand why some subjects were not being taught until I saw a full day in the classroom. Time management is crucial and interdisciplinary teaching methods are important in order to fit everything into the day.

Not only have I observed the theories and practices in the classrooms but I have implemented them and tested them out myself. Through our science and social studies methods classes we taught lessons to our peers. We gained practice in thinking on our toes and creating engaging lessons. We also had the opportunity to grade our assessments and reflect on our own teaching methods. Through our Corrective Reading course, I worked on a reader case study that involved assessing a student and actually working with the student and testing methods to improve my student's reading skills. This was a great opportunity to try out interventions methods and see the impacts that they would have if they were actually implemented. I have also practiced my classroom management skills while teaching lessons in my student teaching placements and noticed which methods seemed to work and which ones had effects on the students.

All of my courses have been giving me insight of how to teach and what to teach. I have attended courses on reading, math, science, social studies, music, art, and PE. All of which are crucial to every student's education. Some subjects are stressed in the school systems due to ISTEP testing and state standard expectations, while others are neglected for these same reasons. Through my Science and Social Studies methods classes I have learned the importance of teaching students the scientific method and encouraging them to explore and think on their own, they also need to understand where they fit into their community and how our world has become what it is. Through Literacy Block I gained an understanding of the building blocks for reading that students must master before they can become fluent readers and gain knowledge from their

reading. The next generation needs all of this knowledge of content to become successful in our society. Even more important than the actual content is the ability to find information, make inferences and predictions, and use the knowledge that they gain throughout their life. Students need to learn how to learn and keep their passion and curiosity for learning alive throughout their lives. It is our jobs as educators to create a learning environment where students can gain an abundance of knowledge of various subjects through differentiated instruction that will continue to keep their joy for learning alive.

The list of insight and knowledge gained through content and method classes here at Manchester could continue forever. Any time I am placed in a classroom, I notice something that exhibits a theory or idea that I have learned about in my own classes. I have gained knowledge of theorist, methods, strategies, student development, assessment and appropriate content. I have learned to constantly alter or tweak my ideas as I collaborate all of my knowledge to create my ideal learning environment. I know that my ideas will still change as I go on and that I will continue to fill up and expand my “teaching tool box” as I gain experience and understanding. The information instilled in me through my content and methods classes has given me the confidence, knowledge, and experience to be a teacher in my own classroom, utilizing my ideas of content and subject matter and the best practices to create the ideal learning environment.