

Planning to Grow: Grading Preservice Lesson Plans With a Growth Mindset

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Introduction

Personal growth of preservice teachers is an important role of university preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, 2006). However, it has been observed that preservice teachers lack confidence in instructional development and lesson planning; questions surrounding “what do my students need to know” and “how do I plan content” are familiar comments from preservice teachers to teacher educators (Sorensen et al., 2018).

Lesson planning is a common stressor among preservice teachers (Sorensen et al., 2018). Individuals who experience anxiety around completing a specific task (lesson planning in this case) may also experience a lack of motivation to finish the task (Darling-Hammond, 2006). Further, Darling-Hammond and Cook-Harvey (2018) state that students who have a growth mindset will seek out new strategies, when faced with a challenge. They continue on to state that students who have a growth mindset display stronger performance among school related tasks.

Preservice teachers who exhibit a growth mindset may experience less anxiety and tackle challenges that are common during the teacher development process. However, facilitating an environment where a growth mindset exists has been a challenge for college students when motivating factors are revolved around grades rather than showing growth based on mastery goals (Dweck, 2006). Due to the nature of university courses, grades are an inevitable part of the evaluation process of students and often have a negative affect on students’ motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Pulfrey et al. (2011) stated that when grade expectations were present, student motivation was centered around performance goals rather than mastery goals. When preservice teachers are faced with challenges, those who set mastery-oriented goals are not discouraged by setbacks compared to those who are performance-goal oriented (Grant & Dweck, 2003).

Further, School-Based Agricultural Education (SBAE) teachers offer a unique professional identity as compared to other secondary school teachers. SBAE teachers wear many hats--teacher, coach, advisor, project supervisor, community member, financial planner, etc.--all while maintaining a work-life balance. The demands that SBAE teachers experience on the job undoubtedly create stress (Solomonson, et al., 2019). Promoting quality learning opportunities, such as lesson plan development, that encourage a growth mindset can be challenging. However, fostering a growth mindset, to reduce job demand stress, is important to develop while individuals are enrolled in a SBAE teacher preparation program. SBAE teacher preparation programs have an opportunity to foster a growth mindset in preservice teachers by replacing performance-oriented grading policies, traditionally associated with lesson plan development, with mastery-oriented goals (Grant & Dweck, 2003).

How It Works

Pre-service teachers in their last semester before student teaching take Methods of Teaching Agriscience II at The Ohio State University. The course is structured with two hours of lecture with three hours of laboratory time each week. Students were expected to lesson plan for, and teach, six microteaching lessons during the semester-long laboratory course.

Students submit lesson plans one week prior to their assigned lab teaching date. Lab instructors reviewed lesson plans and provided feedback through screen recording and verbally annotating through zoom. The recorded link was sent to students to review prior to teaching. Students had the opportunity to edit and correct lesson plans prior to their scheduled lab teaching day. Lesson plans could also be revised and resubmitted for regrading post microteaching.

Course instructors developed and implemented a weighted grading system to address both student lesson planning and grade anxiety. As lesson planning confidence increased during the semester, the grade weights changed to reflect student’s ability. Weighting lesson plans to

reflect students' confidence ultimately reduces the external stress associated with grading many preservice teachers experience and promotes mastery goal setting rather than performance to earn a grade (Dweck, 2006). The first lesson was graded with 35 points for completion and 15 points based on the lesson planning rubric. This was implemented to attempt to reduce the pressure associated with the grade received based on the quality of the lesson plan. As the semester progressed, grade weights changed to reflect the progress of the students' lesson planning ability and confidence levels. Following the third lesson plan, course instructors predicted that students' confidence of lesson planning would increase, and the last three lessons were turned in with full weight based on the rubric grade (out of 50 points).

Results to Date

Three main student feedback themes were observed. The first theme to emerge was *the ability to take risks and try something new*. Students expressed feeling confident at the beginning of the semester because there were lower stakes related to grades when it came to lesson planning. Students identified feeling confident to plan a new, unique teaching strategy that was unfamiliar to them without the fear of losing points. However, several students mentioned planning lecture heavy lessons that were graded without the completion weight because that was in their "comfort area" and knew they wouldn't lose points. The second theme was students expressed appreciation that the grading policy was *realistic to match their ability level*. Several students commented that they knew very little about lesson planning at the beginning of the semester as compared to the end. They appreciated the grading policy and how it was reflective of their growth as they progressed through the semester. One student stated, "the expectations were realistic, and I appreciated not 'failing' a lesson plan because I didn't know everything yet." The final theme was an emphasis of *low stake grades equaled lower social comparison*. Some students noticed they compared themselves less to their peers based on the grades they received. This was especially reflective early in the semester when grades weighed heavily on completion. Students turned lessons in without fear of failure in the eyes of their peers.

Future Plans

The course instructors plan to continue to use the growth mindset grading method in the Autumn 2022 semester. Clearly communicating the grading policy to students through the syllabus and rubric is encouraged to promote clear expectations between course instructors and students. Preservice teachers should be encouraged to adopt mastery-oriented goals to promote a growth mindset (Dweck, 2006) during their time in a SBAE preparation program and beyond. It is important to keep in mind that students are entering this course with limited lesson planning knowledge. The purpose of creating this grading policy was to promote a mindset of students that their ability to lesson plan can grow. Removing the high stakes grading policy for early lessons allowed students to try something out of their comfort zone without taking a risk that would derail their course grade (Pulfrey et al., 2011).

Costs and Resources

There is no cost associated with this project. Course instructors will need to devote significant time to discussing and encouraging the development of a growth mindset in preservice teachers, as well as grading and reporting feedback on lesson planning.

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