

Partnering with Junior Achievement to Provide Field Experience for Preservice Teachers

Introduction/Need for Idea

Field-based experiences are a central tenant of teacher education in which preservice teachers transition from theory to practice (Ball & Cohen, 1999; Darling-Hammond, 2014). Field experiences provide opportunities for preservice teachers to apply pedagogy and engage in varied teaching practices that provide a foundation for continued learning. Additionally, there is value in providing field experiences in diversified learning environments. If preservice teachers are to expand their understanding of teaching and learning, they must participate in field experiences in settings different from those they experienced as students (Brayko, 2013).

Various strategies have been employed by teacher educators to identify and plan field experiences that meet the developmental needs of preservice teachers. In early teaching methods courses, preservice teachers often practice applying new skills to their peers. However, the controlled environment of a laboratory-style experience limits the opportunity for future teachers to understand the full scope and complexities of teaching students (Graham, 2006). There are mutual benefits for utilizing partnerships to support preservice teachers' learning and development through authentic field experience. These opportunities can expand preservice teachers' understanding of learning environments, classroom management, and teaching methodologies. The objective of this partnership was to utilize a community-based organization, Junior Achievement, to better prepare preservice teachers by providing an authentic field experience in a local school. Junior Achievement (JA) is a national organization that provides youth with knowledge and skills for economic and academic success. Their purpose is to "inspire and prepare young people to succeed in a global economy" (Junior Achievement, 2023). Over the past 40 years, the JA program has expanded their presence in schools, reaching more than 4.8 million students per year (Junior Achievement, 2023).

How it Works

To fulfill their purpose, Junior Achievement has an established curriculum to promote financial literacy, work and career readiness, and entrepreneurship aligned with state and national educational standards. As a nonprofit organization, local volunteers are utilized to deliver the curriculum in area classrooms. Given the need for local volunteers to deliver curriculum, a partnership between JA and Ohio State's teacher education program was formed to support preservice teacher learning through an authentic field experience.

Preservice teachers in their first teaching methods class taught JA curriculum as part of their final course assignment. The teaching methods class taught preservice students how to establish a positive learning environment, manage student behavior, identify parts of lesson plans, utilize engaging techniques with teacher-centered methodologies, and implement ready-made lesson plans. Therefore, the partnership with JA provided an opportunity for preservice teachers to apply the science and theory of these concepts into practice through a field-based experience.

Preservice teachers worked with fourth and fifth grade students in an urban school district located near campus, providing a diversified experience outside agriscience education. The JA curriculum for fourth and fifth grade students included a series of six sequential lessons; each lesson was estimated to take 45 minutes to complete. Preservice teachers were paired with a classmate to teach three JA lessons together. JA lessons were taught over two days: lessons one through three were taught on Friday, while lessons four through six were taught on Monday. Junior Achievement volunteer coordinators contacted the school and arranged the logistics of the experience, including establishing the time of the teachings, securing classrooms, and managing paperwork for volunteers. A week prior to the field experience, a JA volunteer coordinator visited the methods class to train the preservice teachers on the lessons. The volunteer coordinator brought ready-made kits with all curriculum materials, provided an overview of each lesson, and assisted the teaching pairs in organizing their materials. A second day of methods class was used to allow preservice teachers to practice lessons with their partners and make adaptations to individualize the delivery of the content.

Results to Date

To date, 13 preservice teachers at Ohio State have participated in the Junior Achievement program as a field experience. Following the teaching opportunity, participants were asked to reflect on their experience. Feedback from the preservice teachers included: “This experience pushed me beyond my comfort zone by exposing me to education through a new perspective,” “This was a great experience, and I would recommend it for future Ag. Ed. students,” “I really enjoyed this experience! I think it was a very unique way to get us out of our comfort zones and gain real experience...,” and “I really enjoyed this opportunity! But I think that tweaking the lessons more would have made me feel more comfortable when presenting the information. I could see where adding things would have made the content easier for the kids.”

Future Plans/Advice to Others

There are plans to continue the partnership with Junior Achievement with minor adjustments. Adjustments include encouraging preservice teachers to add more individualized modifications to the curriculum. Feedback indicated that preservice teachers did not feel they were allowed to make more than a few minor modifications, but through reflection, preservice teachers could identify parts of the lessons where strategies like E-Moments could have enhanced the delivery. Furthermore, several preservice teachers taught individually, due to logistics. The length of time teaching, size of the classrooms, and the level of classroom management needed proved to be difficult for novice teachers. It would be advised that groups of three teachers would be more ideal than a single teacher if this were used as an early or mid-field experience. Lastly, providing an opportunity for reflection is critical, both individually and as a group.

Costs/Resources Needed

There were no costs for this partnership, as the training and materials were provided by Junior Achievement. A space is needed for the volunteer training. Preservice teachers were responsible for their own transportation to the local school.

References

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