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Teaching mathematics through robotics

October 19, 2021



Shellie Casler-Failing, Ph.D., is pictured (center) working with teachers on LEGO robotics and mathematics curriculum.

Georgia Southern University College of Education faculty member Shellie Casler-Failing, Ph.D., found a passion for robotics while student teaching in her graduate teacher preparation program. Placed in a math class where students needed additional instruction, Casler-Failing realized quickly that she would need to think creatively to get the students interested in learning.

“Needless to say, the students had no desire to be in the class and do math,” she explained. “However, they were more than willing to program and test robots. They were so focused on the task and playing with the robots that they didn’t realize they were applying their math skills. I knew at that moment robotics was something I needed to learn more about.”

Since then, Casler-Failing has attended numerous professional workshops on robotics and became an instructor for the Center for Initiatives in Pre-College Education (CIPCE) summer programs to expand her expertise on LEGO robotics. While still teaching in the middle school classroom setting, Casler-Failing started her first LEGO League in 2011 and conducted after school robotics programs for the students.

“Seeing students’ interactions with robotics in an extracurricular environment caused me to introduce them in my math classes,” she said. “I created lessons that I then shared by presenting at several math conferences in New York state. Some of the conference presentations led to invitations to travel to schools to work with teachers on an individual basis.”

With a transition to teaching in higher education, Casler-Failing continues to utilize robotics in her mathematics methods classes and offers local professional development opportunities for teachers grades 4-8. October wrapped up a Georgia Southern internal, seed-funded program offered to local middle grades teachers to create curriculum utilizing LEGO robotics.



Teachers are given the opportunity to pilot their curriculum with robotics with each other to assist in reviewing their instruction.

“Each of the participants had the opportunity to create their own activity and lesson plan that they then piloted with fellow teachers,” explained Casler-Failing. “This opportunity allowed them to gain comfort utilizing the robotics in their instruction and troubleshoot any technical issues in a safe, supportive environment.”

Casler-Failing says teachers should also enjoy teaching with robotics and look for ongoing opportunities.

“Teachers need time to learn about, and play with, the technology,” she explained. “Teachers want to participate in professional development focused on using and incorporating technology in their classrooms, but they will need support to continue to incorporate technology into their lessons.”

Casler-Failing plans to keep working with regional teachers who are interested in learning more about this form of instructional technology in the classroom.

“I am in the early stages of planning a monthly or bimonthly Saturday morning robotics professional development that would be open to teachers of any grade level and content areas who want to learn about teaching with robotics,” she said. “I have experienced the benefits of teaching with robotics and know how powerful they can be as an instructional tool. I want to continue to support our regional teachers in helping students feel engaged and empowered in the classroom, and I just love working with robotics and want to share that passion as well.”

Interested in learning how to incorporate LEGO robotics in your classroom? Contact Casler-Failing at scaslerfailing@georgiasouthern.edu.

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Tags: [Middle Grades Education](#), [Shelli Casler-Failing](#)

Two education professors invest efforts in social media research

October 19, 2021



Marlynn Griffin, Ph.D. (left), and Cordelia Zinskie, Ed.D, publish first book on social media influences on education.

Professors Marlynn Griffin, Ph.D., and Cordelia Zinskie, Ed.D., have served in the College of Education at Georgia Southern University for over 28 years. This year, the pair published their first edited book, [*Social Media: Influences on Education*](#).

“We were invited to contribute a volume to a book series and since we are currently conducting research on a variety of topics centered on social media and education — more topics than we can delve into — this seemed like a great opportunity to invite others to work with us to explore these topics in more depth,” said Griffin.

Griffin, a professor of educational psychology, serves as the pre-professional block coordinator for students entering the undergraduate teacher preparation programs at the University. Zinskie is a professor of educational research and serves as the educational research coordinator and program director of the M.Ed. in Evaluation, Assessment, Research, and Learning. The pair found a common interest in researching social media in relation to teacher candidates.

In 2020, Griffin and Zinskie co-authored [*“Fun and Friendly or Wild and Offensive? Preservice Teachers’ Use of and Image Conveyed by Social Media.”*](#) The article was well received by the academic community as a resource on the potential impact of social media postings on future employment of teachers.

“To my knowledge, we are really the only people who are currently focusing on the e-professionalism aspect as it relates to teacher education,” said Zinskie. “In fact, many of the e-professionalism articles that have been published are from the health and medical fields in relation to their work with patients and confidentiality.”

When a colleague asked if Griffin would like to contribute to a book series, the pair decided to continue their efforts in social media. Serving as co-editors of the book, Griffin and Zinskie received 55 proposals that they culled into 10 chapters focusing on four themes: influences on youth and college students; use for professional development; higher education learning; and social justice and activism.

“It’s exciting to have work from brand new faculty, as well as established and international scholars,” said Griffin. “We have fellow colleagues from Georgia Southern who were included as well.”

The College’s Terry Diamanduros, Ph.D., Elizabeth Downs, Ph.D., and Bryan Griffin, Ph.D., are included in the publication. Emily Krauss, graduate student in the College’s Ed.S. School Psychology program, also contributed to the publication as the graduate assistant for Griffin and Zinskie.

“Social media evolves so quickly that you worry about being out of date by the time you publish, but I think these topics will remain relevant,” said Zinskie. “Furthermore, while some research tends to focus solely on the negative aspects of social media, there are also a lot of positive uses of social media in education. Our book covers a full spectrum of uses.”

Continued research on social media

Efforts to examine impacts of social media on teacher candidates still continue as Griffin and Zinskie, with the help of Krauss, have collected over 300 media artifacts addressing teachers who have been disciplined or terminated from their positions due to social media incidents. With the increase of online learning platforms, they recently decided to gather additional articles describing inappropriate behaviors that may have occurred during distance learning.

“I started getting into social media research almost 10 years ago,” said Griffin. “We started to have issues with students out in their field placements in the schools — photos, comments, what others post, etc. Students are always surprised that employers and others are looking them up on social media. They will tell me that they have their privacy settings on, but that doesn’t mean what you do will not get back to us through screenshots, sharing or others telling us about what they have seen on your social accounts.”

According to CareerBuilder.com, about 70% of employers use social media to screen candidates before hiring.

“Some recommend that teacher candidates have professional accounts and personal accounts,” explained Zinskie. “We feel that is bad advice because nothing is really hidden. Even with privacy settings, it is out there somewhere and someone is going to see it.”

“People are scrutinizing what teachers do,” added Griffin. “There are higher stakes now on social media. When I was starting my career as a teacher, I would have had to purchase a billboard to put out the type of information that is now readily available with a simple click on social media accounts. It goes beyond common sense and really requires an active conscientiousness of what your digital footprint will say about you.”

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