

Chapter 7

Providing Early Childhood Education Teacher Candidates Diverse Clinical Understandings through Professional Development School Experiences

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ABSTRACT

Teacher education programs serving early childhood education teacher candidates have unique challenges and need to work to ensure that each future educator be exposed to a variety of settings and practices throughout their preparation in order to best prepare them to serve the needs of their future young students. A solid background in human development, a well-rounded complement of methods courses grounded in developmentally appropriate practice and experience in a diverse variety of Professional Development Schools (PDS) will go far in meeting this goal. In Pre-K through 3rd grade classrooms early childhood teacher educators can significantly shape these competencies through their choice of, support for, and use of PDSs.

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INTRODUCTION

Teacher education programs serving early childhood education teacher candidates work to ensure that each future early childhood educator be exposed to a variety of educational settings and practices (especially those that are developmentally appropriate for young Pre-K-3rd grade learners) before their student teaching experience in their final year of the program. To be proficient, as new early childhood teachers, the teacher candidate must have an understanding of child development, ethics, content (i.e. literacy, math, social studies, science, etc.), a variety of developmentally appropriate instructional strategies, and how to plan and deliver instruction and assess student learning. In addition, teacher candidates also need to understand and effectively apply their understanding of multiculturalism, second language acquisition theory, technology, children from a variety of SES levels, and those who arrive in the classroom demonstrating a variety of readiness levels, interests, and learning profiles in the Pre-K-3rdrd grade classroom. Early childhood education teacher educators can significantly shape these competencies through their choice of, support for, and use of professional development schools (PDS). Specifically, teacher educators can provide teacher candidates with experiences that more closely approximate participative relationships, engage teachers and administrators in inquiry designed to improve delivery of services to children, and provide instructional experiences for children that are differentiated by their skills and needs.

This chapter provides background information to understand the context of an early childhood teacher preparation program. Then, the authors discuss programmatic and pedagogical practices used in an early childhood teacher preparation program to develop professional ethical practices amongst teacher candidates in this digital world. Examples of courses and instructional activities will be shared to highlight how early childhood pre-service candidates embark this journey at different times in the program.

BACKGROUND

Teacher education programs are also charged with teacher candidates' development of ethical practices (Danielson, 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Teacher candidates must learn to balance their commitment to their students with their obligations to the profession (Earley, Imig, & Michelli, 2011). As a result, teacher candidates must sometimes negotiate situations that require them to help students recognize their potential as worthy and effective members of society while also making every effort to meet professional standards and equitably exercise professional judgment (Levine, 2006). How best to provide experiences where teacher candidates can face these situations have often involved a partnership between colleges of education and public schools (Loughran, 2005; Lucas, 2010). Professional Development School (PDS) partnerships permit teacher candidates to learn about these issues first hand, and to participate in the discussions that their mentors and supervisors have regarding best practices. As the world becomes increasingly reliant upon digital technology, teacher education programs work to promote ethical practices amongst teacher candidates when using these beneficial tools and understanding the unique issues with young children.

PDS partnerships have come about in part as an answer to all stakeholders in America's public school classrooms seeking to provide the best possible experiences for teacher candidates. Ideally, those schools chosen to be part of the PDS partnership are those that are strategically chosen by teacher educators for their state of the art instruction and abundance of experienced mentor teachers. PDS partnerships go both ways; that is to say they are schools where student teachers are placed to learn from the school but the

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