

Chapter 9

A Roadmap for Development, Implementation, and Evaluation of Virtual Practicums in Teacher Education: Virtual Practicums Amidst a Global Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Education for students in the P-12 setting has been subject to significant changes due to access to the internet and online education availability and most recently, the novel coronavirus (COVID-2019) pandemic; therefore, teacher preparation must meet the demands of this new reality through efficacious preparation programs that reflect this reality. Teachers must meet students' unique needs across virtual platforms, which requires mentoring, practice, and training. Today, there are very few programs that prepare teachers to work in an online P-12 setting. Additionally, there is limited research on how to supervise pre-service teachers in an online setting; therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to present a theoretical framework for virtual observations of a pre-service teacher learning to teach in an online P-12 setting. Along with recommendations for partnership development, implementation, and evaluation, a protocol is offered, and recommendations for future research and conclusions are offered.

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INTRODUCTION

In the wake of COVID-2019, overnight, students were removed from school and teachers globally had to immediately transition into emergency online teaching. Likewise, student teachers were confronted with a reality for which they were not prepared or nor had previously considered. This is, in part, due to the nature of many teacher preparation programs and the professional environment for which they were preparing their teacher candidates. Furthermore, and despite the availability of the National Standards for Quality Online Teaching (2011) standards for effective online instruction, the rapid changes to teaching and learning online have left many teachers underprepared and struggling to know where to start with respect to planning, supporting, and assessing learning. This gap in preparation highlights the need for teacher preparation programs to shift to virtual student teaching practicums (VSTP). Additionally, it is critical to include virtual experiences as there has been a significant increase in students attending virtual schools both at the collegiate and P-12 level.

Increase in Online Learning

The Internet has drastically influenced the field of P-12 education, now allowing teachers and students to work from different spaces through technology; however, teacher preparation programs have not kept up with the rapid influx of P-12 online education. This type of online learning has been defined as eLearning, learning conducted via electronic media, especially via the Internet (YourDictionary, 2015). There is a rising prevalence of virtual schools, defined as a school offering courses over the Internet rather than in a face-to-face environment. Today, in the United States about 56.6 million students attend elementary, middle, and high school (National Center for Education Statistics, 2018); of those students, more than 2.7 million are taking part in digital learning as part of their traditional brick-and-mortar education. Since 2010, there has been a 50% increase in students attending P-12 school in an online setting (NCES, 2018). Barbour (2018) describes an increase in enrollment across 501 full-time P-12 online schools by 2,000 and an increase of 16,000 students in 300 blended online and brick-and-mortar schools. Increases in enrollment can be traced to a number of factors; 1) flexibility, 2) change from local school, 3) need for a safe learning environment, 4) increased parental involvement 5) health concerns, 6) bullying prevention, 7) availability of advanced or specialized classes, and 8) attendance to pursue art or sports. Additionally, legislators in several states now require students to take at least one online course to meet the states' high school graduation requirement which has been a development related to state mandates. Some states require more than one online course as a way to prepare students for potential online learning in a post-secondary setting (Gemin, Pape, Vashaw, & Watson, 2015). One of the first states to require P-12 online learning was Florida, establishing the Florida Virtual School in 1996. Florida was also the first state to legislate that all students, P-12, have full and part time virtual options available (Cook, 2002). Many other states followed Florida's lead. While Michigan was the first state to mandate virtual learning as part of a graduation requirement noting that all students should have an opportunity to learn in a virtual learning classroom prior to graduation. Then, some states such as Connecticut mandated credit recovery be offered in an online setting to reduce drop-out rates (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). With the rapid increase in virtual learning not only at the P-12 level, but also at the college and university level, researchers have suggested that online learning is one of the most important skills and new approaches for P-12 schools (Allen et al., 2013; Allen et al., 2011b; DiPietro et al., 2008; Cavanaugh et al., 2004; Means, 2014).

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