

Chapter 29

What Now?

Online Pedagogical Reasoning of Student Teaching Secondary ELAR in Virtual Learning Environments

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive case study centers the experiences of 12 preservice secondary English Language Arts (ELAR) teachers in their final two years of study as they navigate changing school environments in light of COVID-19 restrictions. The preservice teachers discuss successes and challenges with regard to their preparedness to teaching in online or hybrid modalities, their struggles to build learner engagement with social distancing restrictions within the classroom and some students who never log into class live, and similar struggles with intentional relationship building. From these emergent themes, the authors make recommendations on praxis for pre- and inservice teachers, teacher educators, and teacher education programs.

INTRODUCTION

Students and teachers alike struggle with the COVID impact on schools: from school closures affecting 55.1 million students in Spring 2020 (Education Week, 2020) to transitions to virtual learning (MacIntyre et al., 2020) and exacerbated learning loss related to each (Kuhfeld & Tarasawa, 2020). One particularly vulnerable population is those individuals who fit both criteria: pre-service teachers who are both teach-

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ers and students. The traditional manner of student teaching and training for the classroom look very different in the time of COVID.

Effective teacher education cannot be more necessary to equip teachers for the realities they will encounter. Teachers are leaving the field of education in droves, potentially causing global teacher shortages (Kaden, 2020), and those left are feeling more stressed (Perper, 2020) and burnt out (Sokal et al., 2020) than ever before. These stresses are compounded by a feeling of being undervalued and misrepresented by the communities they serve (Asbury & Kim, 2020). College students similarly have reported anxiety and declining physical and mental health as a result of the pandemic (Huckins et al., 2020) and unparalleled levels of stress including increased instances of substance abuse and suicidal ideation (Czeisler et al., 2020). These stressors and challenges can be easier to navigate through effective preparation and field experiences. Based on the findings of the study, this chapter addresses multiple ways in which teacher education programs can address the challenges of transforming and equipping future teachers.

The researchers of this chapter teach upper-level methods, content, and pedagogy courses to secondary and middle grades pre-service English Language Arts (ELAR) teachers. In teaching these students, each of the researchers participates in some field supervision, mentoring students through their classroom placements as they navigate the complexities of teaching outside of the theoretical worlds of their textbooks and class discussions. The nature of this teaching necessitates involvement in the realities of the contemporary classrooms in which our students are placed. In the 2020-2021 school year, among the three researchers, the authors supervised 12 senior-level student teaching interns who teach two 15-week semesters Monday-Thursday all day with a 2-hour Friday seminar, and 13 junior-level teaching associates who teach one 13-week semester from 8-10:45 pm, Tuesdays-Fridays with a 2-hour seminar on Mondays. Five of these pre-service teachers graduated during the course of the study. These pre-service teachers experienced the normal stresses of college students: they enrolled in coursework, paid tuition, and had part time jobs predominantly in service industries impacted by shutdowns and stay-at-home orders. They also encountered the stresses of teachers: lesson planning for in-person learners as well as virtual learners, working in close proximity with students and teachers, and learning new pedagogies and technologies.

This chapter explores how teacher preparation programs can better equip their students. This chapter leads with brief review of the literature about preparing pre-service teachers as well as a contextualization of the problem of the necessary changes to pedagogy demanded by the new modalities and COVID restrictions in contemporary classrooms. Second, the chapter provides an overview of the methodology and third, the chapter shares the qualitative data demonstrating what pre-service teachers identified as strengths of their teacher preparation program and areas in which they felt underprepared due to the changing nature of education. The authors queried the students regarding the differences in education and teaching from when they began their studies to the current situation they will enter as new teachers. The chapter ends with implications for these data on pre- and in-service teachers, teacher educators, teacher education programs, and administrators as well as the implications of the pressures of online teaching on standard best practices, such as relationship building and culturally responsive teaching.

BACKGROUND

In order to better conceptualize the issue of pre-service teacher preparation in a time of virtual school environments, consider the key themes within the literature with regard to the best practices in teaching

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