


Chapter 11

Growing Forward: An Account of a Major Revision in One Elementary Education Program

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the efforts of an elementary education faculty to revamp the undergraduate elementary education program at their university to better align with state requirements for certification. The purpose of the chapter is to provide insight to other teacher educators who may feel a need to revise their programs. The authors begin by sharing the background of their institution and its role in preparing teachers for the region of the state in which it is located. They then identify the rationale for making the changes, describe the old program, and explain the procedures followed in planning and implementing the changes. They next share expected and unexpected problems they encountered in the implementation of the program and discuss some solutions found and some still being considered. They close with a discussion of actions to take to maintain the relevance of the program.

INTRODUCTION

The effort to centralize and standardize preparation of teachers in the United States can be observed as early as the late 19th Century (Wilson & Youngs, 2005), as more and more communities ceded the authority to approve a potential teacher's readiness to teach to centralized entities such as normal schools

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and universities. Normal schools often required only one or two years of preparation while universities typically folded their teacher preparation programs into the final two years of a four-year bachelor's degree. This university model has become known as the "traditional" route to teacher preparation. Such programs, however, have never been without critics (Whitley, 2021; Wilson & Youngs, 2005). Complaints about the lack of quality in such programs led to the development of standards for teacher education as well as the reinstatement of testing as a gateway to teaching. Along with the rise of testing, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) arose with the purpose of evaluating how well a given university teacher preparation program prepared its preservice teachers (Wilson & Youngs, 2005). NCATE has since given way to other accrediting bodies, Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) being one of the most prominent because it is the only one currently recognized by the Council for Education Accreditation (CAEP, 2020a). In virtually all states, teacher certification is issued through the state, based on success on a series of examinations and recommendation by a university teacher preparation program, although all states offer various alternative routes (Zeichner & Conklin, 2005).

Southeastern Oklahoma State University began its existence in 1909 as a normal school established by the state legislature for the training of public-school teachers for the southeastern region of the state. Initially offering a four-year high school program and two years of college leading to teacher certification, two additional college years and the authority to offer two non-education bachelor's degrees were added in 1921. The school became known as Southeastern State College, but it remained essentially a teacher preparation institution. As the need for more post-secondary opportunities expanded in the decades following World War II, the college added new academic departments and was raised to university status in 1974 (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2021). Despite the addition of other areas of study, teacher education has remained a staple of the institution's offerings.

Although the Southeastern Teacher Education Program has been and is considered a traditional program, over the years it has experienced many adjustments and revisions as educational needs and expectations of the state, influenced by federal mandates and other forces (Darling-Hammond, Pacheco, et al., 2005), have changed and as research has shed continued light on how students learn and how teachers need to teach. No program of teacher education should ever be static. In the early 2010s, the Elementary Education faculty at Southeastern Oklahoma State University realized yet again a necessity to redesign the Elementary Education Program to meet changing needs. The authors offer this description of the process and their experience to provide potentially helpful insight to others who feel the need to make major changes in their Elementary Education programs, not because the faculty did it so well, but in the hope that others may learn from the successes and failures of the effort.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Much of the research literature relating to the ability of the nation's teacher preparation programs (TPPs) to produce competent teachers has focused on their structure (Zeichner & Conklin, 2005). The traditional TPP is generally considered to be a 4-year program housed in a university leading to a bachelor's degree. These researchers contrasted such programs with 5-year university programs and various forms of alternative programs by looking at all the relevant studies available. Both of these structures include a foundation in more general knowledge through courses taken during the first two years of college in liberal arts and general education (Nguyen, 2018). Zeichner and Conklin found that "few definitive

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