

Chapter 14

Bracing to Teach Online in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

This case study documents one teacher educator's successful adaptations of traditional pedagogies in online teaching. Specifically, using data from a graduate online course, it examines the general concern and beliefs that online teaching is an inadequate and inappropriate substitute for the traditional face-to-face instruction in a teacher education course aimed at transformative learning. Both quantitative and qualitative data revealed that online teaching evidenced successful student quality learning and adaptability of traditional pedagogies. It discusses the promises and challenges associated with designing and implementing an online teacher education course.

SETTING THE STAGE

As we move further into the 21st century, it is clear that technology is increasingly revolutionizing our lives and how we conduct businesses and education especially teaching and learning. Technology now offers the possibility of higher education to a variety of students who otherwise would not have the opportunity to advance themselves due to geographical and time barriers of the traditional face-to-face classroom instruction and learning. Additionally, vast and diverse multimedia resources now make

it possible to engage learners in interactive and community-based online learning similar to traditional face-to-face setting. Given this availability, many institutions are creating and offering online courses and programs. A review of the literature indicates that online degree programs and courses are increasingly gaining popularity among students in higher education (NCES, 2003). Unfortunately, many faculty including teacher educators are reluctant to embrace online teaching (Taylor & Maor, 2000; Ukpokodu, 2008). Even when studies suggest that most traditional pedagogies can be successfully adapted and applied in online teaching (Beach & Lundell, 1998; Brooks et al., 2001; Chickering

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& Ehrmann (1996); Chong, 1998; Merryfield, 2000; Palloff & Pratt, 1999; Ukpokodu, 2008; Maor, 1999, Maor & Hendriks, 2001; Bonk & Cunningham, 1998; Von Glasersfeld, 1995), many teacher educators are still skeptical and reluctant to embrace it because of concern about its efficacy to promote student quality learning (O'Quinn & Corry, 2002) and the perception that best practices evidenced in traditional pedagogy are not adaptable in online teaching. More importantly, they fear compromising the specific acts of teaching that model for preservice and inservice teachers—the communal and collective act of teaching and learning—and loss of control and power. For example, only 6 percent of the faculty in my department has embraced online teaching. This is not to say that some faculty members have not integrated technology into their courses, but such integration is limited to posting of handouts, grades, quizzes, announcements, and frivolous blogging.

Like many teacher educators, I too harbored some concerns and fears about online teaching. Then I braced the challenge! Now that I have taught the online course for four consecutive years, how valid are my concerns? Is the quality of student learning compromised in an online course? Are best practices evidenced in traditional, face-to-face teaching adaptable in an online course? This case study examines these questions and documents my journey toward bracing to teach a critical teacher education course online. The case study is designed to debunk fears and concerns about online teaching in teacher education, and hopefully, will encourage teacher educators to embrace technology-enabled teaching and learning.

The case study explores three critical questions:

1. How well does an online course promote quality student learning in a critical teacher education course?:
2. To what extent, are best practices evidenced in traditional teacher education courses adaptable in online teaching?: and
3. What are the promises and paradoxes associated with designing and implementing online teaching in teacher education?

CASE DESCRIPTION

Research documents that online instruction is a relatively new phenomenon in teacher education, that only a few faculty engage in online teaching (Sunal, et al., 2003). It is also suggested that even when online teaching can be successfully achieved (McKeon, 2001; Merryfield, 2000; Ukpokodu, 2008), fewer faculty embrace the challenge of technology-enabled teaching because of concerns of student quality learning and effective online pedagogies. Researchers have reported that social constructivist approaches to online teaching have the capability to create and enhance high quality, interactive online learning environments (Hara, Bonk & Angli, 2000; Garrison, et al., 2000). In fact, recent studies have revealed that the teaching and learning environment can foster interaction, collaboration and negotiation of meaning among participants (Maor, 1999; Maor & Hendriks, 2001; Bonk & Cunningham, 1998; Von Glasersfeld, 1995). These researchers and others suggested that the key elements in successful e-learning include: affective support, the creation of a community of learners, peer learning, reflective discourse, and student-centered learning with the instructor taking the role of facilitator (Maor, 2003; Jonassen, 2000). Generally, research suggests that online teaching is an “intellectually challenging forum which elicits deeper thinking on the part of students,” and “has some definite advantages that may make. . . the work worth the effort” (Smith, Ferguson & Caris, p. 67). Given this development, various studies have been undertaken to compare the effectiveness of e-teaching/learning versus traditional, face-face-to format. However, most

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