

Rethinking Special Education Teacher Preparation for a Post-Pandemic World

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Abstract:

The pivot to remote teaching was a wake-up call for institutions of higher education (IHE) teacher preparation programs. This discussion will share solutions and tips for successfully building capacity in a new teacher preparation era. Many IHEs problem-solved, resulting in a myriad of solutions to keep their teacher preparation programs running and relevant during the pivot to remote teaching and learning. This presentation discussion will assist in uncovering a list of teacher preparation program practices that evolved out of the Covid-19 pandemic that seeks to increase the number of pre-service teacher candidates enrolled in IHE teacher preparation programs. The presenters also argue a collaborative, curated post-pandemic pedagogical solution will improve outcomes for teacher preparation candidates and, in turn, advance the positive results for their future students in a post-pandemic world.

The COVID-19 global pandemic exposed the weaknesses in the education system (OCR, 2021). Just as in K-12 school districts, IHEs also shifted from in-person to remote teaching and learning in a matter of days. As the shift began, teacher preparation professors' instructional roles pivoted (Boivin & Welby, 2021). This pivot changed how pre-service teachers and their teacher preparation professors taught, engaged, and observed their pre-service teacher candidates in their practicums and internships (Hodges, Kerch, & Fowler, 2021). Lokanath, Tushar, and Abha (2020) argue that teacher preparation programs were not designed to prepare teachers for teaching remotely because the need for this preparation was not as high before the pandemic. This, in turn, leaves all teachers unprepared to teach their students remotely (Sá & Serpa, 2020). Teacher preparation programs prepare special education teachers for the use of technology within the classroom; teachers were unprepared for the possibility of teaching their students and providing services for their students remotely. This sentiment was echoed by many early career teachers, such as a language arts teacher in Norman, Oklahoma, who stated in a live television interview: "I am not an online teacher. I have not been trained to do any of this, and I do not want my students to be at a loss because I am in uncharted territory," (Cerna, Rutigliano, & Mezzanotte, 2020). In addition, many teacher preparation professors were ill-prepared. They elicited the fear of the unknown when implementing many technology tools to recreate and model engaging teaching opportunities (Hodges et al., 2021).

Some IHEs were able to flip to remote learning in one day and not lose instruction or engagement; returning to safe, on-ground teaching and learning much earlier than many other IHEs. These strategies and methods will be shared in the presentation. Preliminary university comprehensive results show a decrease in absences and an increase in overall grades (Carter-Tellison, 2022). Particularly for pre-service teacher preparation professors, the opportunity to provide additional collaboration, technology exploration, teaching modeling, and harnessing of artificial intelligence has been identified as enhancements and improvements to the program.

Pandemic Teacher Preparation Strategies and Methods:

- Attending virtual conferences and webinars in lieu of observation hours
- Supporting outside partnerships with education-focused nonprofits via video-conferencing platforms
- Hosting virtual panels of discussion with current teachers to discuss impact on education
- Cross-class collaborative projects
- Use of HLPs to model good teaching

Post-Pandemic Teacher Preparation Strategies and Methods:

Teaching

- Updating assignments for pre-service T's to prepare for an online or hybrid teaching environment
- Providing opportunities for peer-to-peer technology tool learning
- Incorporation of attendance at virtual K-12 technology conference

Program Development

- Increased emphasis on virtual-ready strategies
- Use of HLPs to model good teaching and discuss in class (as Gradual Release Model- I Do, We Do, You Do)
- Use of AI to write lesson plans, behavior rules, analyze gap analysis and draft S.M.A.R.T. MAGs

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