Chapter 1

Utilizing Program Specific Data to Develop Case Studies for Use With Preservice Teachers

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ABSTRACT

With a focus on data driven decision making, teacher education programs need to prepare preservice teachers to analyze data while modeling data driven practices in our own programs. Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of using case studies to promote critical thinking, analysis and interpretation, and higher order thinking. This study utilized the results from surveys of residents enrolled in a clinically rich residency program to develop and implement relevant case studies for use in program coursework. The utility of using case studies in graduate coursework was evaluated through a survey of current residents. The theoretical and practical value of creating case studies based on program specific challenges, and examples of the case studies that were generated from this data will be shared.

INTRODUCTION

This was a great process because it allowed us [the cohort of residents] to work together to come up with strategies for teaching. I appreciate these case studies because this is definitely information I can use in the classroom and I like the idea of sharing ideas [with classmates]. –resident from the 2015 cohort

In this time of data driven decision making, districts, schools, administrators, and teachers are expected to continually assess practices and make adjustments to better meet student needs (Hamilton, Halverson, et al., 2009; Mandinach, 2012). In effect, educators at all levels are being asked to use data to inform and improve upon existing practices. Much has been written about using data to inform decisions in the

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P-12 realm, however, less has been documented in terms of how data is being used, or can be used in higher education, more specifically, in teacher education programs (e.g., Mandinach, Gummer, & Muller, 2011). This study will examine the role case studies can play with regards to elevating best practices in secondary teacher education. The authors will offer suggestions of what practices teacher educators and others who play a role in teacher induction (e.g., cooperating teachers) should use to ensure that preservice teachers’ needs are met while also modeling the kinds of practices preservice teachers will be expected to use in their own classrooms.

In 2010, The New York State Education Department (NYSED) put out a statewide call for graduate level clinically rich teacher preparation pilot programs. In addition, the Blue Ribbon Panel established that clinical preparation in teaching, like the medical residency model, be “integrated throughout every facet of teacher education in a dynamic way” (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010, p.5). In response to these calls for increasing clinical preparation, the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) program at our college developed and implemented a clinically-rich graduate level residency track for teacher preparation in 2011. The residency program became part of an existing MAT program that was established in 2004 to transition working adults into full time teaching positions across the state of New York. The definition of a “clinically-rich” teacher education experience varies, as highlighted in the NCATE Blue Ribbon Panel with programs requiring varying degrees of clinical experience (NCATE, 2010).

However, teacher residency programs appear to share a common expectation that preservice teachers (in this case, residents) spend a full academic year working collaboratively with a master teacher (e.g., Guha, Hyler, & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Our clinically-rich residency program follows the New York State Education Department (NYSED) criteria which suggests that a year-long clinical experience include “guided classroom practice through an internship for up to a year with an effective educator or intensive pre-service preparation, together with intensely supervised teaching and on-going, clinically-based instruction” (NYSED, 2017). This program provides preservice teachers with relevant theory and research through coursework and a placement in a classroom with an experienced and effective teacher to “practice and hone” their skills over the course of an academic year (National Center for Teacher Residencies, 2017). Our residents spend four days a week in the fall semester with their cooperating teacher saving the fifth day for the residency seminar, where the entire cohort comes together with program faculty to discuss their experiences and issues. In the spring term, residents remain in their placements five days a week, gradually assuming full responsibility of their cooperating teacher’s schedule for a period of eight weeks. Being placed in the same cooperating teacher’s classroom for an entire school year brings with it a unique set of positive opportunities and outcomes, as well as challenges. This study explores the use of case studies as a mechanism to consider and troubleshoot the possible challenges in order to enhance the positive outcomes of a year-long, full time clinical placement.

This study analyzed program specific data to determine what the biggest issues and concerns were for residents enrolled in our residency program. The authors then used this data to develop a series of case studies that were based on program specific data and outcomes. In addition, these cases were discussed and analyzed in graduate coursework to push current residents to think critically about the most common problems and issues that prior residents encountered while enrolled in our residency program. These processes and the associated outcomes will be discussed in detail in this chapter.
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