Chapter 16
E–Coaching to Support University–Public School Partnerships: Disrupting Power Dynamics in Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Three teacher educators partnered with a local high school to pilot an e-coaching model with secondary social studies pre-service teachers. Findings reveals an e-coaching supervisory model that can nurture relationships between university and public schools to support pre-service teacher (PST) development, can increase a PST’s independence and confidence, and can support creation of a third space where power dynamics between university and public schools are disrupted and potentially leveled. Implications for e-coaching as a means of supervising field experiences in rural teacher education are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

When learning the skills needed to perform surgery, surgical interns receive immediate feedback from their residents and chief surgeon during surgery. On the football field, the quarterback often wears a wired helmet that allows him to receive immediate feedback from the offensive coordinator watching from the sidelines or from another location in the stadium. If medical practitioners and professional athletes are providing and receiving immediate feedback to learn and sharpen their skills, we wondered, “why are
Educators not supporting their preservice teachers in a similar manner?” University supervisors often provide delayed feedback, after observing the teacher in the classroom or on video, which does not allow the teacher to implement the feedback until a later lesson, if at all. Depending on scheduling and the time needed to upload the video lessons, it may be more than 24 hours before the supervisor is able to provide feedback to the pre-service teacher (PST). With current technology, such as wired helmets worn by a quarterback, why are we not also providing feedback that will have an immediate impact on PSTs’ practice? Recognizing a need to transform supervision for PSTs, we piloted virtual supervision and coaching (i.e., eCoaching) at a public university in the United States. We acknowledged that other video conferencing tools such as Skype (https://www.skype.com), Google Hangouts (https://hangouts.google.com), and Apple FaceTime may be used, but we chose Zoom (https://zoom.us) because it was supported by the university and accessible to students and faculty. We investigated two questions as part of this pilot study: (a) How feasible is eCoaching as a professional learning strategy for preservice teachers? and (b) what are high school teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of eCoaching as a professional learning strategy? In this chapter, we will describe the implementation process of the virtual supervision and eCoaching, discuss barriers and challenges, and provide preliminary results from the pilot study.

BACKGROUND

To pilot the use of eCoaching and supervision through Zoom, we chose to work with PSTs who were secondary social studies education majors at Appalachian State University and who were completing their field experience in high school social studies classrooms during the spring semester of 2018. The PSTs were in tandem history majors, and their academic program was housed within the Department of History, in the College of Arts and Sciences. Roughly 60% of all history majors at Appalachian State choose to earn their degree in both history and social studies education. Though the PSTs are assigned two supervisors during their student teaching semester (one academic supervisor from the history department, and one supervisor from the College of Education), their first field experience must be supervised by either the methods professor or another faculty member in the College of Education. In other words, the onus is on the methods professor in the College of Education to organize supervisory visits with each PST during the methods semester.

All of the students within the history/secondary social studies program are required to take a specific methods course in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction called Teaching High School Social Studies (CI-3100) during the semester immediately preceding their student teaching semester. In this methods course, PSTs complete 50 field experience hours alongside a mentor teacher in a high school social studies classroom. Enrollment in the program has ranged from 14 to 37 students per semester, and students are often placed in neighboring mountain counties for their field placements. The methods instructors and supervisors work together to schedule observations of PSTs’ teaching episodes, to observe students teaching lessons in the field—often for the first time, and to provide encouragement, field notes, and rich feedback. Using traditional supervisory methods, students either received a face-to-face observation or video recorded their lessons. Both of these options resulted in delayed feedback that did not have an impact on the instructional practices observed during the lesson.

We acknowledged that these conditions were clearly not ideal, and recognized a need to develop a better way to support PSTs who were navigating classrooms and taking on the role of teacher for the first time. We also recognized the need to nurture relationships between PSTs, mentor teachers, as well