Chapter 23
Moving Beyond Four Walls: The Expanding Online Teacher Preparation Classroom

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ABSTRACT

In this qualitative research study, the authors explore the use of the Remote Observation of Graduate Interns (ROGI) as a tool for expanding online instruction for teacher licensure programs. Data are presented evaluating the differences between remote (synchronous) and face to face observational processes for a social studies lateral entry teacher, a student teaching social studies graduate intern, a social studies methods instructor, and a generalist. Through their rich, thick descriptions of the data, they conclude that remote and face to face observations are not equivalent methods; however, they are comparable and thus interchangeable, providing an innovative alternative for addressing constraints of traditional observation processes and shrinking operational budgets. Finally, the authors describe how ROGI moved learning and assessment beyond four walls and the potential ROGI offers in redefining teacher preparation using a multimedia video conferencing platform.

INTRODUCTION

On October 22, 2009, in remarks at Teachers College, Columbia University, Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan expressed urgency for teacher preparation programs to retool and revision current practices to prepare citizens to be competitive in a global society. Duncan stated that, “by almost any standard, many if not most of the nation’s 1,450 schools, colleges, and departments of education are doing a mediocre job of preparing teachers for the realities of the 21st century classroom. America’s
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university-based teacher preparation programs need revolutionary change—not evolutionary tinkering” (p. 1). Duncan articulated that our educational system is failing to develop 21st century knowledge, skills, dispositions for students (see Partnership for 21st Century, 2009), and especially those in high poverty and high need schools. The concerns echo research documenting restricted educational opportunities, either through limited access to curricula or diverse pedagogy, resulting in inadequate preparation of future citizens to successfully contribute to a world economy, missing the mark of an equitable, quality education for all students as well as the disciplinary goals of the social studies (Center on Educational Policy, 2007, 2008; Crocco & Costigan, 2007; McGuire, 2007; Pace, 2007; The Civic Mission of Schools, 2003; Wallis & Stephoe, 2007; Wills, 2007).

Secretary of Education Duncan targeted teacher education programs as a leader in retooling the American educational system, backing research acknowledging teachers as the greatest determinate of student achievement (Collias, Pajak, & Rigden, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond & Ball, 1997; Heafner, Ackerman, & Barts, 2005; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). On the winds of change, the walls come crashing down. This metaphor links educational rhetoric to the current economic crisis. Economic pushes had shifted decision-making from large investments in infrastructure renovations and new construction to low overhead options such as online learning, ending the “brick and mortar era” of schooling (Schulken, 2008, p.1). Teacher education programs are being asked to do more with less and to do it in more effective and creative ways. Compounded, these issues provide the framework for the necessity to question current practices and to search for innovative strategies for preparing teachers.

Facing the current national economic crunch experienced within the shrinking workplace, teacher education expansion of face-to-face observations has become cost-prohibitive as universities address demands of cost-cutting. Travel budgets are among the first targeted; thus, limiting operational budgets for reimbursing faculty for travel to and from schools for clinical observations. In addition to budgetary obstacles, over the last few years, state licensure requirements have shifted the practice of observing lateral entry teachers from the local education agency (e.g. the school or school system) to the licensing institution. Accompanying these changes, state teacher shortages have created an environment in which universities have sought to increase teacher preparation program enrollment through various pathways to licensure. Combined with these demands of limited operating budgets, increased university expectations in the number of observations that graduate interns receive, and increased number of second career professionals seeking licensure, expectations have intensified the need to develop an efficient and financially feasible observational method that supports the needs of program expansion while improving the quality of teacher preparation. As the overwhelming need for teachers continues to grow in the many states across the nation along with the changing economic, licensure, and university demands, it is imperative for teacher preparation programs to seek alternative and innovative processes for licensing teachers. These new goals require revolutionary approaches to current practices, course offerings, and program structures. One College of Education at a large southern urban university has developed a fully online licensure program to address multifaceted interests of second career professions, workload capacity, and budgetary constraints, while establishing groundwork for new ways of thinking about teacher preparation. However, the establishment of online programs at this university has not been without barriers, both pedagogically and physically, challenging the scope of programmatic outreach and structures of learning.

This university began the development of a 100% online licensure program in 2004 but fac-