

Chapter 23

Digitally Mediated Supervision: Redefining Feedback Systems in Field-Based Courses

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on the praxis behind the development of digitally mediated supervision and distance-based field experiences. The theoretical framework combines past principles of supervision with present technological models. The practical application lies in both a hybrid digitally mediated program at the undergraduate level and a fully functional model at the graduate level. The concerns addressed represent those facing higher education institutions across the United States, and the solutions presented are those initiated at a Mid-Western land-grant institution. The authors examine the hardware, firmware, and cloud technology used to deliver the program, and the reflective feedback model developed for online teacher preparation. Four types of feedback are defined: (1) self-reflection, (2) 10-minute walk-through, (3) focused feedback, and (4) formal evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

Kansas State University developed a comprehensive digitally-mediated supervision system forming the foundation of an online program. The culmination of five years of field-based research, this system is currently used as the sole supervision model in the M.A.T. program and in a hybrid format for supervision in the undergraduate campus-based program. The program development was bound by a theoretical

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framework incorporating the ideals of Schwille (2008); He (2007); Cogan (1972) and Dussault (1970). Additionally, the development of the program focused on the characteristics of Millennials, the largest demographic in the current teacher pool (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014) and used contemporary innovative technologies in a manner consistent with the SAMR model (Hamilton, Rosenberg, & Akcaoglu, 2016; Puentedura, 2014) as a means of creating a common language to reimagine the roles of reflection, feedback, and collegial relationship.

National Context

The quality of the classroom teacher is the single most predictive school-related variable of student academic achievement. Teacher quality is representative of the unique blend of knowledge, skills, and values that individuals bring to the profession. These assertions are supported by decades of educational research and by the policies and expenditures of local, state, and national governments (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2013; Aud, Wilkinson-Flicker, Kristapovich, Rathbun, Wang & Zhang, 2013; Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig 2005; United States Department of Labor, 2016). Foundationally, the ways in which teachers are educated, developed, and mentored matters. Unfortunately, politically volatile trends exist within the world of education. The national shortage of teachers in high needs areas is currently one issue demanding attention. While many individuals and organizations weigh in on causes and explanations for this phenomenon, others engage in a rhetoric of denial. In Kansas, stakeholders are keenly aware that long-term substitute teachers with little training in classroom management, assessment, or pedagogy currently staff elementary classrooms.

Teacher shortages have caused a growing number of U.S. Americans to turn to teaching as a second or third career. Although the vast majority of initial teaching licenses are issued through traditional four-year programs, the number of students pursuing non-traditional pathways to teaching has grown dramatically in the United States over the last decade (Aud, Wilkinson-Flicker, Kristapovich, Rathbun, Wang, & Zhang, 2013). The number of initial teaching licenses issued through alternative routes has more than doubled, and more than one-third (39% or 45,444 students) of those awarded an initial teaching license in 2011 did so through post-baccalaureate or graduate programs (Aud, Wilkinson-Flicker, Kristapovich, Rathbun, Wang, & Zhang, 2013).

A few of the large, exclusively online universities (e.g., Western Governors University, Liberty Online University, University of Phoenix, and American College of Education) and a handful of traditional universities (e.g., University of Southern California, Drexel University, Grand Canyon University, and Southern New Hampshire University) offer a graduate degree (M.A.T. or M.S.) in education and initial elementary licensure. Two major online universities recently reported graduating 18,000 students in education over a three-year period. These universities utilized a traditional supervision model of hiring local supervisors for observation and evaluation purposes. This process is fraught with inconsistencies in the preparation and process of evaluating student teachers. Local stakeholders have reported a definite distinction between the preparation of students in on-campus programs and that of students who have taken courses from online institutions other than Kansas State University.

Nationally, alternative pathways to teacher licensure most often focus on secondary teachers and/or teaching in urban areas. High quality teachers are important at every level but especially in elementary school as children build foundational ideas, skills, and attitudes that persist into future schooling and adult life. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017) lists “elementary school teachers” among the “occupations with the most job growth” and projects that elementary teaching jobs will increase 168,000 (12.3%) by

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