Chapter 57
Using Technology to Enhance Teacher Preparation Field Experiences

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes a field director's revision of a field experience placement system and model for a teacher education program at a two-year institution. In this case study, the field director documented the conversion from a paper system to using a learning management system to support the field experience process of 324 students. Results from this case study indicate a positive correlation between the components of the process and the features of the learning management system. In addition, findings from the case study reveal that the learning management system provides additional benefits for program assessment. The conversion of a paper system to a learning management system is documented as well as the implications for other aspects of teacher education assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher education is a dynamic field of study that bridges theory into practice. This application manifests itself in the teaching continuum through methods courses and field experiences. The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) defines Field experience as a variety of early and on-going field based opportunities in which candidates may observe, assist, tutor, instruct and or conduct research. Field experiences may occur in off-campus settings such as schools, community centers or homeless shelters (NCATE, 2008). Field experiences are a cornerstone in preservice teacher education programs and they are encouraged to occur early and often.

What Is a Field Experience?

As a part of the discussion of field experiences, the research literature speaks to different types of field experiences for preservice teachers' field experiences are dictated by conceptual frameworks of the program accreditation requirement and the nature of the courses to which they are tied. Field experiences are an institution in preservice teacher education programs today. Moreover, early teacher educators have found merit in the "learning by doing" approach as early as the mid-nineteenth century (Cruickshank & Armaline, 1986). Parallel to John Dewey's emphasis on experiential education, field experiences today are focused on providing examples of best practices and pairing students with teachers who are not only exceptional teachers, but also first-rate role models willing to connect in reflective practice with preservice teachers (Posner, 2005). "Learning to teach effectively requires that students access the minds, not only the observable behaviors of effective teachers" (Ethell & McMeniman, 2000, p. 87). Educational reform efforts have caused both accrediting and professional organizations to cultivate standards that expressly refer to and affect early field-based experience (Hurst, Tan, Meek, & Sellers, 2003).

Effective teacher education programs recognize the importance of field experiences in preparing preservice teachers to be successful in their potential careers. McGlinn (2003) stated that field experience is one of the most common "real world" learning experiences implemented in schools of education across the United States. Many preservice teachers believe that field experiences provide the only "real" learning in their teacher education programs. The importance of including field experience early in the preservice teacher's experience and scaffolding experiences in later coursework allows them to understand the challenges and necessary problem-solving skills innate in teaching. These experiences permit them to make the correlation between the content learned in coursework and real-life experiences in the classroom (Darling-Hammond, Hammerness, Grossman, Rust, and Shulman, 2005). Learning to make these connections amplify the likelihood that the theories, concepts, and skills learned in coursework will be committed to memory and used later on as they begin their teaching career (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, and LePage, 2005).

Ross, Hughes and Hill (2001) performed a study of 68 preservice teachers registered in three different sections of a mandatory educational psychology course. These researchers investigated the preservice teachers' understanding of educational concepts when links to real-life classroom use were integrated in instruction. The results of this study found enhanced understanding occurred when the alliance of educational concepts to application in K-12 school classrooms was made. The results of their study revealed that field experiences could produce quantifiable improvement in understanding explicit course content. Equally important to having essential content knowledge and skills for teaching, is the notion that preservice teachers should understand the importance of reflective and evaluative behaviors. The employment of these higher order thought processes lead them to learn from their teaching so that it repeatedly improves (Bransford, Darling-Hammond, and LePage, 2005). The amalgamation of coursework and field experience provides possibilities for preservice teachers to become conscious of the value of these practices.

According to Moore (2003), field experiences hold great potential for providing candidates with the opportunity to practice decision-making through reflection and evaluation. In her study of 77 preservice teachers enrolled in a 3-week field practicum straddling three successive semesters, Moore sought to determine how classroom field settings affected the learning process of preservice teachers. Moore noted that university instructors teach preservice teachers about the instructional settings they will come across in the classroom and through reflection. They are able to examine classroom situations in order

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