

Chapter 12

Transitioning a Methods Course to Online in a Teacher Education Program That Is Not Fully Online: Lessons Learned

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ABSTRACT

The transition of an undergraduate course to fully online is examined through the lens of a professor who revised the platform for the course and through the perspectives of preservice teachers participating in a hybrid version of the course in their teacher education program which is not offered fully online. Benefits of flexible student schedules and meaningful discussion participation emerged, indicating that preservice teachers can navigate learning modules and benefit from an online course offering. Challenges of implementing teamwork in the online environment arose throughout the semester of implementation, indicating a need for improvements/revisions. These lessons learned from this case study contribute to a systematic approach to transitioning from offline to online courses and augment the literature base of the experiences and appropriateness of online preservice teacher education courses.

INTRODUCTION

Offering the Creative Arts Methods course fully online in the undergraduate elementary (P-5) teacher education program arose from a desire of the instructor to (a) allow preservice teachers to maximize the use of technology resources; (b) provide opportunity for the preservice teachers to be adept in the use of technology with their students; (c) build the preservice teachers' sense of belonging by being engaged in teamwork, group assignments and discussions in the ample and flexible time schedule of a fully online course; (d) enhance undergraduate students' success in navigating fully online courses; (e)

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provide more flexibility for preservice teachers in scheduling their concurrent coursework and practicum field experience activities/assignments; (f) reduce conflicts for scheduling conferences/seminars between university supervisors and their preservice teachers; (g) reduce the number of performance agreements/probationary actions, which many times are a direct result of the preservice teachers' time management issues; and (h) provide an exemplary online model for other undergraduate courses. The Creative Arts Methods course in this study was a hybrid course (described more fully below). The focus of this methods course was an introduction to and practice with key components of Visual Arts, Music, Dance, and Theatre/Drama for the purpose of equipping pre-service teachers with knowledge and skills to implement arts activities in various subjects in the general classroom, particularly with children's literature. As this project unfolded, several recurring themes emerged, resulting in didactic lessons learned in implementation, benefits, and challenges—all of which were ruminated during the transition of the course to fully online the following semester.

ONLINE LEARNING EFFICACY

With the purpose of attracting more students and offering flexible learning opportunities, online teaching and learning is becoming increasingly widespread in higher education, in a wide range of disciplines, and at all program levels. During the COVID-19 global pandemic, the shutdown of face-to-face classes (Kennedy, 2020) has further driven a need for efficacy in online learning. In “Learning to Learn from a Distance” (2020), the consensus is that although the online platform was thrust upon the world during heightened emotional times and in an emergency situation, “the pandemic has accelerated a trend that was already taking hold in higher education. And that, surprisingly, might be a good thing” (para.1).

Distance education is not a new idea—course offerings by mail, satellite, and interactive television preceded the offering of internet-based courses that have exploded in recent years (Keramidas, 2012). Some of the applauded benefits to universities include flexibility of time and space, cost-effectiveness due to less overhead, and an expanded scope for attracting students (Keramidas, 2012; Macon, 2011). Documented benefits to students include increased accessibility by non-traditional and rural students, an opportunity for more student-centered environment and engagement, and capitalizing on technology (Caverly & MacDonald, 1999; Downing & Dymont, 2013; Eaton et al., 2015; Paulus et al., 2010).

Online learning is not without its challenges. Many students enrolled in online courses have their own set of complications in their daily lives, are distracted, and lack motivation (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004). Online learners must adapt to the online platform, learn to manipulate the technology necessary to navigate course requirements, and adjust to mainly text-based communication. Online communication takes longer than face-to-face communication, and there is the issue of accessibility by all students, regardless of their physical, emotional, or social requirements (Conrad & Donaldson, 2004). As noted by Chang and Kang (2016), the nature of online learning, which includes mostly asynchronous communication, contributes to the difficulty of interactions between students and their peers and between students and their instructors.

Within the teacher education literature, many aspects of teachers' online preparation remain vague, and there has been a shortage of literature to define the appropriateness of using online courses (Downing & Dymont, 2013). They also note that “there is a general division among the teacher educators as to whether the online classroom was an appropriate method for preparing preservice teachers...” (p.106). Clary and Wandersee (2009) noted similar discrepancies. For example, many preservice teachers enrolled

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