Chapter 51

K–12 Virtual Educator Preparation:
Insights and Inquiry

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ABSTRACT

The number of K-12 online programs and course offerings across the Unites States has increased during the last decade. The issue of how to best identify and address the instructional preparation that K-12 online teaching endorsement (OTE) candidates will need to position themselves for hire in virtual settings raises questions about the quality of preparation they receive in virtual educator training programs. Even with standards in place, preparing K-12 OTE candidates to become online educators comes with a wide range of challenges that includes evaluating OTE program design and preparation practices for validity, relevance, and effectiveness. The field of K-12 online learning lacks literature related to how institutions of higher education can best prepare candidates for careers in this field. Findings from this review use common trends, inconsistencies, recommendations from educational theorists and experts, and implications for further study to demonstrate the need for establishing best-practice in K-12 OTE candidate preparation.

INTRODUCTION

Research in the field of K-12 online education has shown that the number of K-12 online programs and course offerings has increased exponentially in the last decade (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011; Baran & Correia, 2014; Barbour & Reeves, 2009; Bennett & Lockyer, 2004; Davis & Roblyer, 2005; Downing & Dyment, 2013). This increase has spurred initiatives backed by the U.S. Department of Education to create a model that would incorporate virtual school preparation into preservice teacher

education programs, including movements to have more faculty and support staff for online teaching endeavors (U. S. Department of Education, 2005).

Most teacher colleges in the nation must address both Council for Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) standards and their individual state standards for traditional teacher preparation. CAEP standards (CAEP, 2011) as currently written acknowledge that technology is a critical area of teacher preparation. However, organizations such as the International Association of K-12 Online Learning (iNACOL, 2011), the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), and Quality Matters® (QM) also have established standards for quality online teaching based on the belief that online teaching requires special skill sets and considerations. While these standards and requirements for effective K-12 teacher preparation include preparing candidates to teach online, no two states use the same sets of curricula, standards, or measures to assess teacher candidates for competencies with course content and teacher practicum performance. This presents challenges in evaluating the validity, relevance, and effectiveness of K-12 teacher preparation in the United States (Davis & Roblyer, 2005; Everhart & Hogarty, 2009; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012a; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012b).

The authors of this chapter conducted a review of existing literature in the field of K-12 online learning aimed at identifying studies that have examined K-12 online teaching endorsement (OTE) candidate preparation practices. This review identified American-based and internationally-based studies, many of whose researchers come from cultural and professional backgrounds that are as equally varied. The authors also found that many of the scholars cited here, while serving as faculty at institutions of higher learning in the United States, have contributed an international focus to their studies by virtue of their origins, their educational preparation, their research foci, or some of each. As such, the authors have made an effort to include in this review referents denoting the areas of the world where different studies were conducted to highlight research pertinent to the field of K-12 online learning that extends beyond the scope of the United States.

Most research to date has examined quality as related to teacher certification program-development and markers of successful online courses in secondary education settings, higher education settings, and university degree programs (Baran & Correia, 2014; Bollinger, Inan, & Wasilik, 2014; Compton, 2009; Corry & Stella, 2012; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012a; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012b; Lorenzo & Moore, 2002; Paul & Cochran, 2013; Shelton, 2014; Wang, 2006). This collection of research includes research and literature from Canada, Taiwan, The Netherlands, Scotland, and the United States. Other K-12 online teacher preparation studies that emerged from the search stemmed from Canada and the United States and tended to focus on the shift in educator role from one of disseminator-of-knowledge to one of online-instructor-as-facilitator (Diamond-Hicks, 2011; Jorrín-Abellán & Stake, 2009; Mehta & Fine, 2010; Taylor, 2014). The authors of this chapter also found studies that have acknowledged the need for research that examines how researchers and practitioners develop the programs that train educators for teaching in virtual environments (Archambault & Crippen, 2009; Baran et al., 2011; Cavanaugh et al., 2009; Corry & Stella, 2012). As researchers in the field of K-12 online learning, the authors of this chapter believe that high-quality K-12 educator preparation programs must offer courses of study for teacher candidates for jobs in all fields, including the growing field of K-12 virtual instruction. Taking steps to equip K-12 online teachers with appropriate knowledge, tools, and training experiences is essential to helping them achieve success as virtual classroom instructors and leaders. Based on initial findings from field literature, the purpose of this chapter is to present literature from the field that: 1) establishes the background and context of K-12 virtual schooling; 2) identifies the skills uniquely needed to be an effective K-12 online teacher; 3) examines what is currently known about best teaching practices

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