

Chapter 7

Completing Student–Teaching Internships Online: Instructional Changes During the COVID–19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Distance-based learning has become one of the common alternative learning options. Currently, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many academic programmes, including programmes with internship requirements, have switched their teaching and learning strategies from on-campus learning to online platforms. This study aims to understand the experiences and sense-making processes of student-teachers who have completed their student-teaching internships online during the COVID-19 pandemic. To understand the feedback, experiences, and sense-making processes of this group of student-teachers, it is important to collect first-hand sharing. More importantly, the trend of distance learning-based student-teaching internships will be developed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The results of this study will serve as one of the first reports about student-teachers' experiences.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching is traditionally considered as a vocational mentorship between the students and instructors (Weiner & Jerome, 2016). Although student-teachers receive theoretical skills and textbook knowledge from the classroom environment, student-teachers need to complete a semester-long internship at the targeted school in order to achieve their initial license in the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Darling-Hammond et al., 2002). During the internship, student-teachers need to observe their supervisors and experienced teachers' teaching and learning skills and to perform instructional behaviours in a real classroom environment. Throughout the internship, student-teachers receive feedback from their

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supervisors and improve their teaching practice. As a result, student-teachers may ultimately perform their own classroom management and teaching without supervision (Han et al., 2018).

Traditionally, the student-teaching internship requires intensive face-to-face interactions and engagements among student-teachers, experienced teachers, supervisors, and students in real classroom environments (Baker et al., 2008). However, due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, many school districts decided to switch their teaching to distance learning platforms to comply with social distancing recommendations. In other words, teachers and students meet online for lessons, rather than in school. Such distance learning is practiced in K-12 school systems and in universities, and therefore affects initial teacher training programmes. As for the coursework component of these programmes, student-teachers may continue their coursework online with their university professors. However, completing the internship in a school district remains a problem during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The vocational internship allows students and junior-level workers to gain hands-on experience, field experience, practice, mentorship, and real-life working experience at the organisational level, and may facilitate interdisciplinary mental and behavioural developments (Pauzé et al., 1989). Before the internship, students-teacher usually do not understand how to handle situations beyond the classroom and textbook levels. Students may ask, solve, and answer questions, as well as connect situations with textbook examples using reflective ideas (Jones & Abes, 2004). However, the distance learning-based internship can be challenging as students cannot experience the real workplace environment. Observation, hands-on experience, and problem-solving opportunities can be limited due to the absence of peer-to-peer interaction (Shea, 2006).

Many people have advocated that distance-learning education is exclusively for adult and tertiary education. However, the population of primary and secondary distance learners has increased gradually due to parental decisions and schooling needs in remote geographic locations. Since the last decade, more than 1 million elementary, middle, and high school learners studied at distance-learning-based schools (i.e. at least half-time) in the United States (Picciano & Seaman, 2009). Although some scholars have argued that distance-learning education might be harmful to traditional-age students' development (e.g. peer-to-peer interaction), home-schooling is not uncommon in some rural communities, particularly those without school districts (Bauman, 2002). As the population of distance learners and the demand for distance learning are increasing, teachers need to be prepared for the distance-learning-based teaching and learning environment (Rasheed, 2020).

According to Dessoff (2009), school administrators and leaders seek teachers and staff with experience in distance-learning education and technologically-assisted teaching and learning approaches. Most of the current teacher-training programmes and state licensing requirements need teachers to complete different courses and pass several exams in order to achieve licensure. However, training for distance-learning is not required (Dessoff, 2009). Therefore, parents, school leaders, teachers, and policymakers have expressed their desire for the development of distance-learning classrooms and appropriately prepared teachers (Gemin, 2017). From the perspective of teachers, many have expressed that they have found difficulties in distance-learning teaching and learning, as their teaching experience and professional training usually have not focused on online teaching. Also, for some subjects with physical and lab requirements, such as physical education, music performance, and biology, curricula have been designed to include at least some physical interactions with peers and instructors. Although these courses have been successfully taught online, most teachers do not properly understand how to manage the online learning and classroom experience (Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). Many administrators have indicated that some subjects cannot be taught by distance-learning, such as culinary arts and fine

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