

Chapter 10

A University–Based Reading Clinic and the Pivot to Online Instruction: Promises, Pitfalls, and Lessons Learned

Phyllis M. Robertson

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, USA

Bethanie C. Pletcher

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter describes the conversion of a face-to-face reading clinic held on a university campus to one implemented fully online. Two faculty members, in different disciplines, worked collaboratively with a local elementary school principal to transition the program to the new format. Teacher candidates from several certification areas worked together in pairs to tutor a shared tutee. The transition to virtual instruction involved rethinking ways to prepare candidates to conduct assessments, plan and implement engaging instruction, and monitor progress in a virtual environment. This chapter will provide a description of this model, along with the logistical and pedagogical decisions made and the lessons learned along the way.

INTRODUCTION

How did you “pivot?” This key question of the past year is particularly crucial to those in teacher preparation. Not only were teachers and students across the globe forced to pivot rapidly and unexpectedly from face-to-face to remote instruction, but teacher preparation program faculty had to reconfigure courses to enable their students to engage in meaningful remote field experiences (Carrillo & Flores, 2020; Mutton, 2020). Institutions of higher education were suddenly left in a position to largely “fend for themselves” as they endeavored to construct alternative opportunities for candidates to participate in the practical

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experiences necessary to develop the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become competent teachers (Quezada et al., 2020, p. 472).

This chapter describes one such unexpected pivot, the conversion of a face-to-face reading clinic held on a university campus to one implemented fully online. Two faculty members, in different disciplines, worked collaboratively with a local elementary school principal to transition the program to the new format. The transition involved rethinking ways to prepare candidates to conduct assessments, plan and implement engaging instruction, and monitor progress in a virtual environment. This chapter will provide a description of this model along with the changes necessitated by the pivot, the logistical and pedagogical decisions made, and the lessons learned along the way.

BACKGROUND

In order to serve all learners, teachers must be prepared to work together to provide intervention to students in need of additional support. Unfortunately, research to date indicates that they may be inadequately prepared to do so (Fowler et al., 2019; Hurlbut & Tunks, 2016), due in part to their lack of authentic classroom experiences. Teacher preparation programs must thus ensure that candidates gain the experience necessary to provide high-quality intervention, while simultaneously providing opportunities for them to acquire the competencies needed to support delivery of virtual instruction that this past year has taught us will be critical to their future success.

Preparing Teachers for MTSS/RTI

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS), including Response to Intervention (RTI), are designed to prevent academic difficulties, address disproportionality in special education, and support more accurate identification of students with disabilities (Blackburn & Witzel, 2018; Coyne et al., 2018; Fuchs et al. 2014; International Literacy Association, 2013). Although MTSS/RTI have been increasingly adopted in districts throughout the, teacher preparation to engage in such processes remains inadequate (Barrio et al., 2015; Fowler et al., 2019; Harvey et al., 2015; Hurlbut & Tunks, 2016). In order to ensure effective implementation, teachers must develop expertise in a variety of domains, including: multi-tiered models, data-based decision making, the problem-solving process, curriculum and instruction, the classroom environment, and collaboration, along with the necessary professional attitudes and beliefs (Prasse et al., 2012), such as believing that all students can learn and meet academic benchmarks and that data should be used to make instructional decisions.

Reading Intervention

Among students who experience academic difficulties, reading is the most common area of concern (Morrow, 2019). Educator preparation programs continue to address the inadequacies of preparing teacher candidates to implement effective early reading intervention (Al Otaiba et al., 2012), noting a lack of basic knowledge related to working with students who demonstrate reading difficulties (Hoppey, 2013). In their review of 10 years of research focused on teacher preparation for RTI, Barrio and colleagues (2015) found that candidates felt unprepared to provide reading intervention for students and that this was due to their lack of experience within authentic classroom settings. Teachers who have been afforded

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