

Collaborative Self–Study of an Online Literacy Master’s Program Pilot Year: Problem–Solving Practices in a Pandemic

Katarina N. Silvestri
SUNY Cortland, USA

Brittany Adams
SUNY Cortland, USA

Charlotte Pass
SUNY Cortland, USA

Nance S. Wilson
SUNY Cortland, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter illustrates the authors’ intradepartmental, collaborative self-study of their literacy master’s program through use of an adapted collaborative conference protocol to surface problems and solutions related to policies, procedures, and pedagogies. The department prioritized pedagogies fostering deep engagement with literacy education content as well as relationship-building with students. This intradepartmental case study leverages self-study methodology to structure collective inquiry, identifying “critical events” for deeper questioning, reflection, observation, and guidance for future practice. Three critical events created tensions relating to the literacy master’s program’s implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic: field experience placements, community-building with students, and student-teacher workload.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the movement from face-to-face teaching and learning towards remote, hybrid, and hybrid environments for K-12 schools and in higher education. However, the pressure to move graduate programs online has been mounting for the past decade as a financial stanchion for overall decreasing enrollment and higher demand for online learning opportunities (Allen & Seaman, 2017). Responding to these financial pressures, one literacy education department situated in a Northeastern comprehensive college well-known for its teacher education programs piloted its fully-online literacy master's program leading to teacher certification during the 2020 – 2021 academic year, paralleling the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. This program serves both full-time practicing teachers in K-12 schools as well as full-time students not yet teaching. As such, the program experienced COVID-19 directly and through the realities of graduate students who were full-time practicing teachers on the front lines of COVID-19 or teaching online for the first time.

This chapter illustrates the use of *collaborative conference protocols* (CCPs; Edge et al., 2019) as a part of a larger intradepartmental, collaborative self-study. CCPs are used by reflective practitioners to surface and contextualize *critical events* (i.e., problems) with *critical friends* (Costa & Kallick, 1993), who then note observations, make speculative comments, and share understandings from individual and multiple perspectives. This process leads to reflection and the generation of possible solutions moving forward. Ideally, these solutions are implemented and revisited during future collaborative conferences.

The department undertaking this collaborative self-study through the use of CCPs sought to answer the following questions relating to policies, procedures, and pedagogies involved with transitioning to online learning during a global pandemic:

1. What are the perceptions of students learning in and faculty teaching courses entirely online during the course of the degree program?
2. What are the processes and procedures involved in facilitating online learning within this degree program?
3. What pedagogies facilitate meaningful engagement with course content?

The objective of this chapter is to illustrate three critical events raised during collaborative conferences relating to the program's implementation of the COVID-19 pandemic, specifically with respect to field-experience placements, community-building with students, and student-teacher workload. The chapter demonstrates how collaborative self-study regarding online teaching and learning through times of struggle can be used to instrumentalize "the potential . . . for knowledge production, of value for both local contexts and the broader teacher education research community" (Dinkelman, 2003, p. 8).

BACKGROUND

Contextualizing the Project

LaBoskey (2004) advocates for conducting self-study collaboratively, writing "since knowledge is experiential and knowledge generation is critical reflection or *inquiry as stance*, teacher knowledge can best be understood, transformed, constructed, and articulated by the teacher self in collaboration with oth-

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