

A HOLISTIC EDUCATIONAL APPROACH FOR OFFSITE TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the cultural impacts on off-campus school-based teacher-training programs. These programs offer teacher candidates to experience a real world understanding of the culture of a school. The study concludes that teacher candidates benefit from immersion in the school environment. This allows teacher candidates to experience first-hand knowledge, which does not occur with textbook. Furthermore, off-campus teacher-training programs encourage the teacher candidates to celebrate the demographics of a school. In summary, the cultural impacts may help change attitude, clear biases, remove barriers, and assist in creating a holistic approach in modifying and adapting appropriate instructional strategies to each individual student. This paper focuses on an off-campus approach to teacher education.

INTRODUCTION

With the need to find new ways to create a healthy financial institution, university administrators adjust their business practices toward a more international or global extension in the cultural context. As such, many colleges and universities are considering locating these enhanced business ventures, which concern teacher-training programs, in off-campus school-based locations. An off-campus school-based location is a local school in which a teacher-training program occurs. Teacher candidates experience the day-to-day routines of a school while attending to their studies. This is opposite to an on-campus school-based location, where a teacher candidate attends to their studies while experiencing the day-to-day routines of the university environment. This paper focusses on the merits of creating off-campus teacher training programs.

When considering off-campus school-based locations it is important that the approach in pursuing a balanced budget should not sacrifice sound pedagogy. Of prime consideration must be the culture of these school-based locations. The culture of a school is the unofficial curriculum that can make learning meaningful. It consists of the environment and day-to-day school routines, such as the way interactions occur, how communication takes place, the diversity of the school and classroom, similarities and differences shared, and how all of this affects students. The culture of the school is also the way in which teachers and administrators conduct themselves so that a maximum learning milieu can occur. In on-campus school-based locations, a student will learn about inclusion. In an off-campus school-based location, the inclusive nature of this type of teacher training program allows teacher candidates to witness the on-site inclusive environment of the school. They feel the heartbeat of the local school that one cannot experience from a textbook or through second hand information that occurs at on-campus programs. It is a direct way to experience the working environment of the profession they have chosen.

There are many cultural aspects to school based teacher training programs. This article will examine:

1. *How off-campus school-based instruction prepares teacher candidates ready to be engaged in the real world.*
2. *How teacher candidates attending classes within a local school levels the playing field for those who came from a different culture or country.*
3. *How off-campus school-based teacher candidates have the opportunity to witness the most current on site accommodation for students with disabilities.*
4. *How teacher candidates get to see the demographic first hand in the local area.*

Off-campus school-based instruction prepares teacher candidates to be engaged in the real world.

The nature of learning is in the everyday action of the school. To locate teacher candidates' learning in the local school is to present an experiential learning environment that allows them to witness and experience what their future students, and themselves as future teachers, will go through. Normal activities such as school bells, assemblies, track and field, communicating with parents, communicating with administration, communicating with colleagues, communicating with students, and routines and rules of school buses, are events that one can see, hear and experience. For example, one can see the children lining up to get on a school bus, hear the overhead announcement, feel the tension in the air during exam time, touch the holiday decorations, and smell the pizza and hotdogs on special days. One can experience a fire drill or a lock down and see the issues connected with it. A teacher candidate can experience how the administration works with teachers and parents to make the school a working endeavor. The memory of these senses remains with the participants. It remains with the teacher candidate. Off-campus school-based teacher candidates not only experience the "utopia" side of the school, they also are exposed to unexpected incidences such as school yard bullying, a flu outbreak, a fire, a bomb threat, or any other emergency crisis. This reality check prepares them to respond better and faster to an unexpected situation in school, following emergency protocol.

Most importantly, they may see and model teacher-student interactions such as incorporating simple steps into teaching mannerisms. For example, acting friendly, smiling, speaking in a soft tone, and giving compliments will help the student feel more at ease in the classroom (Cowden, 2010). A simple everyday act, such as to saying good morning to the principal, the caretaker, fellow teachers and to students, is a conscious effort made socially and reaps psychosocial benefits. It builds a very positive relationship that prepares teacher candidates to be mentally and psychologically ready to start their day. The simple acts that facilitate the mental process of perception, memory, judgment and reasoning exists in professional research (Lynch & Gussel, 1996). Since human cognition is both conscious and unconscious as well as concrete or abstract, a teacher candidate in an off-campus school based program can use the experience of the environment to generate new knowledge on how to navigate the culture of the school, a key in the prevention of job burnout. The prevention of job burnout may seem a bit early to discuss in a teacher-training program, however, it is a vital part of the discussion.

Since teacher candidates' beliefs and values guide how they relate to school personnel, students and situations in the school, they are more likely to create and maintain healthy relationships with others by experiencing. The on-site experience gives them a sense of purpose, awareness, and community. It also gives them understanding.

Teacher Candidates attending classes within a local school levels the playing field for those who came from a different culture or country.

We live in a land where we relish cultural differences. If one of the purposes of schooling is to mirror the cultural makeup of the community, it naturally extends that our teacher-training programs should mirror this cultural diversity in the candidates they accept. It is quite possible that some of these candidates will be first generation citizens with limited exposure to a local school. They may not understand what it is like to be educated in our elementary or secondary school system. Being part of an off-campus school-based teacher-training program allows them to experience and not just read about the environment in which their future profession exists. Furthermore, bridging this gap by placing teacher candidates in the field instead of the university can help those teacher candidates whose first language is not English receive a better start (Williams, 2013). It also encourages the teacher candidates who have English as a second language, to exchange their unique gifts and to experience and discuss differences and similarities with other teacher candidates.

We must not ignore the issue related to the satellite nature of the off-campus school-based program; supportive services usually are not be offered at the school site. Services such as program and career counseling, essay writing help, and tutoring may not be readily available for these candidates. To assist with off-campus school-based teacher training for all and especially this population, university administrators need to tailor the experience and needs of new students to help them ease into university study by providing a more extensive and comprehensive service (Galardi, 2012). Off-campus or off-site teacher training programs are willing and able to offer a service that had not been able to offer in the past. They are willing to bring the entire training program to several different sites to accommodate students who are not able to travel to the main campus facility. For example, PASS Program (2017) of University of Calgary, offers the entire training program curriculum and services supported by qualified faculty and staff. Their logo says it all, “Find the concept or clue... click and move”.

Off-campus school-based teacher candidates have the opportunity to witness the most current on site accommodation for students with disabilities.

The report from Office of Disability Employment Policies asserted that attitudinal barriers often lead to illegal discrimination, are not overcome simply through laws. The report stated that the best remedy is “familiarity”. It is important to have people with and without disabilities mingle as coworkers, associates and social acquaintances. The desired outcome is a change of attitude leading to “comfort, respect and friendship” (Office of Disability Employment, 2017). This is a key concept and advantage for the teacher candidate in the off-campus school-based teacher-training program. It is probable that a teacher candidate may understand the literature and research concerning a person with a disability. However, does this actually occur in the culture of a school? Does a person with disabilities have accommodations similar to what the candidate the? Do they have acceptance within the culture of the school? What about the concept of bullying? What does the school actually do to make their learning and learning environment a place of value? These are issues where understanding is an important ingredient in learning. Off-campus school-based teacher training programs allow teacher candidates to experience working answers to these and other questions. It can allow the candidate to see how the research results in practice. The

candidate can experience the classroom needs for such accommodations as an updated wheelchair, interpreters or interveners. It also allows the teacher candidate to experience first-hand exposure to assistive technology software and hardware. These devices or technologies could be intimidating to teacher candidates without them actually experiencing how a person with a disability uses these devices. Experiencing schoolchildren using these devices may help to demystify any myths about the person with a disability. They may also learn how students with disabilities navigate elements of inclusion, differentiation and Universal Design for Learning and Technology (Hodgkinson, 2000). They may begin to appreciate barriers that students with disabilities face. Those who are most informed regarding the abilities and needs of individuals with disabilities are most likely those who will approach them with support and encouragement and engage them with strategies and behaviors that will enable and encourage them to move from dependence to greater independence (Sze & Cowden, 2012). Off-campus school based teacher training programs that are engaged in the school culture can satisfy this need.

Those involved in the off-campus school-based teacher-training program get to see the demographics first hand in the local school as part of the culture of the school.

Almost two decades ago, Kraglund-Gauthier, Young, & Kell (2014), at the Center of Demographic Policy, stated that there has been a major increase in student diversity including minorities, immigrants, students whose second language is English and students from poverty or wealth. Our demographic landscape has been changing rapidly in the last 10 years due to immigration, social and economic policies (Moran, Vozzo, Reid, Pietsch, & Hatton, 2013). Schools are a natural component of this trend. Off-campus school-based teacher training programs allow the teacher candidate to witness first-hand the characteristics of the demographic distribution in the community. With this first-hand observation, teacher candidates can form a more realistic, compassionate, intellectual and accurate assessment of the various cultures that make a community. It allows them to witness the various cultures interacting with each other and be able to value the similarities and differences while increasing respect and understanding for everyone. This is an important analytical skill that one must obtain and pass on to our next generation of educators: teaching them how to think through experiencing and not what to think by accepting second hand opinions as truth. Off-campus school-based programs allow this condition to occur.

Similarly, university instructors living and breathing in the “Ivory Tower” because of their long-term commitment to their subject matter and their relationship with the university can benefit from off-campus teaching. There are always questions as to how many actually visit the school sites or even remember what it is like because they have been away from the local school environment for decades. According to Massey and Gouthro (2011), putting the program in a local school not only benefits the teacher candidates, but also, at the same time, brings the university instructor back to a street level where everyone speaks the same “language”. Off-campus school-based programs allow the university instructor to re-connect with practitioners in the local school. When the university instructor witnesses what is happening in the school, it may even spark their interest in investigating current issues in the school field.

CONCLUSION

It is important for administrators to realize that in pursuing a balanced budget they should not sacrifice sound pedagogy. It appears to this author that off-campus school-based teacher training programs not only do not sacrifice sound pedagogy, but also may actually improve it.

This program places the teacher candidates' learning in the field instead of the university. It gives more understanding between the literature and actual classroom practices concerning a person with a disability. It allows teacher candidates to witness the various cultures interacting with each other in the classroom and be able to value the similarities and differences while increasing respect and understanding for everyone. Being part of an off-campus school-based teacher-training program allows teacher candidates to integrate in the current as well as future culture of the teaching profession. This unofficial curriculum can make learning meaningful.

As administrators look to find new ways to create a healthy financial institution while maintaining sound pedagogy, it appears that moving towards off-campus school-based teacher-training programs satisfies this condition. This paper is not intended to compare on-campus versus off-campus program effectiveness. However, while this is a major condition, further research is required to account for other factors regarding off-campus school-based teacher candidate programs. Issues such as costs included in moving a university program to a local schoolboard, providing similar services for candidates and professors that occurs at the university, and distance and isolation from the university, before one can make a proper assessment.

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