

Virtual Teaching and Learning: Navigating Uncharted Waters through School-University Partnerships

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Abstract: This article seeks to describe a virtual summer school field-based experience implemented through a school-university partnership during the COVID-19 pandemic where online platforms were utilized by the university-based teacher educator, school-based teacher educators, and the teacher candidates. A review of literature is woven throughout the article citing research on school-university partnerships and virtual learning environments. Qualitative data collected from the stakeholders, including open ended responses, journal entries, and final evaluations, were analyzed and summarized. These results reflected the reciprocal nature and mutual benefits of the teaching and learning partnership between the school and university. Additionally, the findings confirmed perspectives that would be vital to the success of future educators.

Keywords: clinical experiences, teacher education, virtual learning environments, summer field experiences

NAPDS Nine Essentials Addressed:

- Essential 3: Professional Learning and Leading – A PDS is a context for continuous professional learning and leading for all participants, guided by need and a spirit and practice of inquiry.
- Essential 4: Reflection and Innovation – A PDS makes a shared commitment to reflective practice, responsive innovation, and generative knowledge.
- Essential 7: Shared Governance Structures – A PDS is built upon shared, sustainable governance structures that promote collaboration, foster reflection, and honor and value and participants' voices.

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According to a statement from the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2010),

The education of teachers in the United States needs to be turned upside down. To prepare effective teachers for 21st century classrooms, teacher education must shift away from a norm which emphasizes academic preparation and course work loosely linked to school-based experiences. Rather, it must move to programs that are fully grounded in clinical practice and interwoven with academic content and professional courses. (p. ii)

Over a decade later, with the move to virtual learning, the need for the educator preparation program (EPP) at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi (TAMU-CC) to shift its methods of instructional delivery became more than just a good idea. It was paramount. The removal of in-person preservice teachers from partnership districts in the midst of completing their clinical experiences due to the COVID-19 pandemic created increased opportunities for innovation and reflection.

This article seeks to describe a virtual summer field-based experience implemented between a school-university partnership during the COVID-19 pandemic where online platforms were utilized by the university-based teacher educator, school-based teacher educators, and the teacher candidates. A review of literature is woven throughout the article citing research on school-university partnerships and best instructional practices for virtual learning environments. Qualitative data collected from all stakeholders, including open ended responses, journal entries, and final evaluations, were analyzed. These results reflected the reciprocal nature and mutual benefits of the teaching and learning partnership between the school and university.

History of the University EPP

TAMU-CC is a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI), situated as the area's premier institution of higher education. The university is set in an urban area boasting a 317-acre campus. As part of the state system, it is included in a network of universities, state agencies, and a comprehensive health science center. As an HSI, it is a culturally and linguistically diverse college offering students the opportunity to study and collaborate with fellow students from racial and ethnic groups that are different from their own. The Educator Preparation Program was one of three finalists for the Christa McAuliffe Outstanding Educator Preparation Program in 2010 and was also recognized by the Center for Teaching Excellence for its school-university partnerships in 2012.

The Educator Preparation Program is housed within the College of Education and Human Development and offers initial teacher certification leading to a Bachelor of Science degree. The program allows students to seek certification in core subjects focusing on either a Reading delivery, a Bilingual Education delivery, a STEM emphasis, or a Special Education delivery track. Within the tracks, students can earn a BS in Bilingual Education, All-Level Special Education, 4-8 mathematics, All-level Music, and All-level Theater. The Texas Education Agency (TEA) requires two comprehensive examinations for initial certification. The Texas Examinations of Educator Standards referred to as TExES (ETS, 2014) has two parts: a Core Subjects examination and a Pedagogy and Professional Responsibilities examination (PPR). In the last ten years, 97% of the EPP's students have obtained teaching jobs within six months of graduation. This is largely due to the commitment that the university and college has to

excellence and to the effective collaborations between the EPP and its K-12 partners. While the practices of the program span across two clinical semesters and multiple courses, the program goal is to provide an integrated approach that allows the various boundary- spanning stakeholders of the partnership – such as the teacher candidates, school-based teacher educators, university-based educators, and administrators – to work toward a common set of goals and expectations for clinical practice that will enrich the experience of each member and ultimately result in a highly prepared teacher candidate.

School-University Partnerships

The Partnership Proclamation in the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education’s Clinical Practice Commission Report (2018, p. 22) and its evaluation of EPPs across the nation states that “clinical partnerships are the foundation of highly effective clinical teaching.” It highlights that the

clinical partnership, as distinct from clinical practices, is the vehicle by which the vision of renewing teacher preparation through clinical practice becomes operational. Effective clinical partnerships are gateways to developing reflective practice centered on preparing highly effective educators while simultaneously renewing teaching and learning in PK-12 classrooms. (AACTE, CPC Report, 2018, p. 22).

School-university partnerships are a critical component of TAMU-CC’s Educator Preparation Program. The success of the two clinical semesters relies greatly on the strongly established partnerships with surrounding districts and campuses. These authentic and successful partnerships with the area school districts provide a training ground for our teacher candidates for both clinical teaching as well as residency opportunities. Currently, eight school campuses serve as partner schools for Clinical Teaching I (known as the field-based experience) and 47 campuses for Clinical Teaching II (known as clinical or student teaching). During the fall and spring semesters, in Clinical Teaching I, teacher candidates have field experience for two days per week in the PK-12 classroom, while Clinical Teaching II places the teacher candidate in the classroom five days a week.

Teacher candidates collaborate with school-based teacher educators and university-based teacher educators within the partnership setting to plan, develop, teach, and reflect on teaching and learning so that they develop the skills and dispositions essential to ensuring their PK-12 students’ academic success. The EPP is committed to the practice of simultaneous renewal evidenced by its four-fold mission:

- I. To prepare future teachers in a field based program where they can benefit from the expertise of clinical teachers and direct observation of and work with students;
- II. To facilitate the professional development of practitioners using formal and informal strategies;
- III. To conduct inquiry, jointly with the school community; and
- IV. To assist with the renewal of curriculum and instruction.

In order for our candidates to develop the skills, knowledge and dispositions necessary to demonstrate a positive learning impact for PK-12 students, strong partnerships are integral.

In alignment with National Association of Professional Development Schools [NAPDS] Essential 7 and the shared governance structures in place in our EPP, each partnership campus is identified through a joint effort between university-based teacher educators, school-based teacher educators, and community members, all part of a clinical experience advisory committee (NAPDS, 2021). In collaboration with the university-based teacher educator and the school-

based teacher educator, teacher candidates plan, develop, and teach a myriad of lessons focusing on different subject areas. Furthermore, the connection with the partner school promotes student participation in events such as Family Math and Family Science Nights. Once a school is identified as a possible partnership site, the university personnel meet with the administrators at the school and both sides develop an action plan for a mutually beneficial partnership at the site. Partnership sites are continuously evaluated based on both the needs of the university and the schools. As a way to continually refine our partnerships, we send out surveys and meet with the administrators and mentor teachers at the end of each semester to ask questions about their roles as school-based teacher educators and share what worked well and what we need to continue to work on. Our university-based teacher educators meet monthly to share updates from their school sites, problem solve any challenges that have occurred, and brainstorm ways to meet the needs of the stakeholders with whom we work. In addition, stakeholders serve on an advisory board that meets with the goal of increasing the effectiveness of the EPP and its partnerships.

West Oso Independent School District (WOISD) is one of the intentionally chosen partnership districts where teacher candidates are placed for their clinical practice semesters. WOISD serves 1,977 students at four campuses including a pre-kindergarten to 2nd grade school, a third to fifth grade school, a 6-8 junior high, and a 9-12 high school. This district has an Early College High School program allowing 50 students per year to accelerate their learning through taking dual credit courses, with a portion of those students graduating with both a high school diploma as well as an Associate's degree. Ninety-three percent of the students in the district are considered economically disadvantaged. The student population is 88.3% Hispanic, 8.3% African-American, and 2.9% White. Twelve percent of the students are served in Special Education programs. The district has a strong sense of community pride and support. The vision of West Oso ISD is to *embrace real world education to ensure self-reliant and socially responsible citizens*. The mission is to *enrich and build a progressive school community through relevant and diverse opportunities*. WOISD believes in the strength of business, community, and higher education partnerships. The district has a PK-12 STEM initiative which includes a comprehensive curriculum, where all students have the opportunity to engage in interdisciplinary learning experiences that encourage problem-solving, creativity, and perseverance.

WOISD has a long history of partnering with TAMU-CC. In addition to serving as a site for Clinical Teaching I and II for teacher candidates majoring in EC-6 Reading, EC-6 STEM, and EC-6 Bilingual, the district has hosted counseling interns for several years. This school-university partnership has been the recipient of the Texas Education Agency (TEA) Grow Your Own grant for three years. This initiative provides teacher candidates the opportunity to participate in a 28 week full time clinical experience during their senior year. These teacher candidates are then hired by the district as in-service teachers. Recently, TAMU-CC, in conjunction with the WOISD partnership, received funding through the National Science Foundation Robert Noyce Teacher Scholarship grant, which incentivizes math and science majors to become grade 7-12 teachers. The partnership's proposal for the Noyce grant has a strong social justice component, with a goal of preparing teacher candidates to be equity-focused. Recent societal events, including the pandemic, have heightened awareness of systemic inequities in our educational system that this grant and our school-university partnership aims to address (NAPDS, 2021; Zenkov et al., 2013; Zygmunt & Clark, 2016). In addition, undergraduate EC-6 Reading students gain field experience during their reading diagnostic course by working with students at the district's grade 3-5 elementary campus. Other collaborations include a volunteer tutoring program organized by a university professor who

provides training to her tutors as well as free professional development to the district's K-2 teachers. At the high school level, English Learners participate in a program, Learn from the Experts, where a university Spanish professor brings both Spanish I students as well as Spanish majors to the high school campus. The university students are matched with an emerging bilingual high school student. The undergraduate students help the high school students with their English while the LEP students help the university students improve their Spanish literacy skills. These collaborations allow the university faculty to continue to stay current with needs and priorities in the K-12 district, while the district benefits from innovative research-based practices coming from the university.

Clinical Practice and the Summer Field-Based Experience

Clinical practice provides a framework for TAMU-CC's guiding principles; it serves as a central framework through which all teacher preparation programming is conceptualized and designed. The EPP aims to provide teacher candidates with a sequenced and scaffolded program designed to support them as they develop as an educator and continue to sharpen their content and pedagogical skills while enrolled in the EPP. Throughout the program and coursework, candidates are regularly engaged in authentic classroom settings culminating with, and designed to, prepare them for a year-long field-based and clinical teaching experience. The course work is carefully developed, re-evaluated, and re-invented every semester to align itself with the needs of national educator standards as well as the omni-present changes of the partnership campuses and growing diverse populations. The strong collaboration and communication vehicles in place allow for a consistent exchange of ideas and strategies between the EPP and the school partnerships.

One of these field-based experiences where candidates apply theory to practice while fully immersed in a classroom setting within a partnership district and campus(es) occurs during the summer and is known as ASCENT. The ASCENT – Adjusted Scheduling and Curriculum in Education for Non-Traditional Students – program is designed to help public school paraprofessionals and nontraditional students complete the field-based hours they need to begin clinical teaching in a condensed and more intensive program than the 15-week field-based (Clinical Teaching I) semester offered during the regular academic year.

Developing a Virtual Summer Field-Based Experience

When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, West Oso ISD was not prepared to deliver virtual instruction, nor did they have the resources to provide students with the technology they needed to participate fully in remote learning. When it became apparent that COVID-19 and distance learning were here to stay, the partner district, along with the university EPP faculty, began identifying professional development topics and making plans to provide teachers with the support they needed to implement high quality online instruction which included collaborating with the university on new partnership possibilities with virtual instruction for the upcoming summer. Traditionally, the partner district offered a June summer school with a focus on providing intervention for students who did not pass state exams. With state testing requirements lifted, the partner district had the freedom to design a summer program that met the learning needs of students.

The first step in beginning to build capacity and ensure equitable access to quality remote instruction was the purchase of 200 Chromebooks, so that all students in WOISD would have technology to participate in synchronous instruction. There are many factors that contribute to

quality remote teaching and learning including hardware, software, learning environment, and quality of instructional resources, but “compared to the other factors, the preparation of the teacher by far outweighs any other factor in this system” (Bull et al., 2016, p.117). A national survey by the Rand Corporation’s American Educator Panels (Hamilton et al., 2020) found that teachers in high poverty school districts were even less prepared than those in more affluent districts to provide high quality virtual instruction. In fact, 44% of teachers surveyed stated that their greatest need was to receive professional learning on strategies to keep students engaged.

The school district and university field-based experience coordinator began collaborative discussions about the possibility of a virtual partnership with teacher candidates enrolled in the ASCENT program. Upon realizing the ASCENT students would not be able to complete the requirements for the field-based experience at its regularly scheduled summer school site, the university-based teacher educator, Dr. Lopez (pseudonym), began planning for virtual daily class sessions, which would consist of lesson planning, instruction, technology tools, and assessment using approved state videos. The plan shifted when an agreement was reached with the partner district as they expressed interest in moving forward with a virtual summer program beginning in mid-July and would allow the ASCENT students to become part of their Google® Classroom environment. This level of collaboration was possible due to the long established relationship characterized by strong communication and trust. This relationship allowed for creative collaboration during these times of uncertainty.

The district chose to move the summer program to July in order to provide ample professional learning and planning time for both the in-service teachers and teacher candidates in June, tenets of the reciprocal approach to the continuous development of innovative teaching skills and strategies in our school-university partnership (NAPDS, 2021). The WOISD Curriculum and Instruction department utilized the TPACK model (Koehler & Mishra, 2009) to address all the knowledge needed to deliver high quality remote instruction. This model recognizes that in order for technology integration to be effective, educators need to have knowledge in three areas: content, pedagogy, and technology. While the in-service teachers tended to have greater pedagogical knowledge, the teacher candidates had the benefit of recent coursework in instructional technology. Best practices for remote learning (Morgan, 2020) include time spent collaborating with both students and colleagues. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE, 2017) identifies collaboration as a key component of impactful technology education. Collaboration needs to be intentional and ongoing. During the month of June, in addition to structured professional learning opportunities, teaching teams were provided with dedicated planning time where they were able to unpack a needs assessment for the upcoming virtual July program.

The district utilized both in-house instructional technology staff as well as consultants from the local educational service center to provide training. Training was differentiated to meet the needs of all educators. Prior to the global pandemic, approximately 25% of the district’s secondary teachers and none of the elementary teachers utilized Google Classroom. Training topics included: Google Classroom for Beginners/Intermediate/Advanced, Google Meet, Nearpod, Flipgrid, Peardeck, Jamboards, Google Forms and Tracking Student Progress, Virtual Manipulatives, and Best Practices for Coteaching remotely. In addition to teacher training, the district provided asynchronous and synchronous virtual training for parents as well. The parent training focused on navigating in Google Classroom.

The summer programming in the district included classes for both struggling students as well as STEM enrichment. ASCENT teacher candidates were assigned to both the accelerated

instruction as well as enrichment classes. In addition to providing students with devices, each student was provided with a supply bag in order to engage in at-home, hands-on learning activities. Supplies varied by course and grade level. They included small dry erase boards with markers, scissors, rulers, calculators, journals, Unifix cubes, sight word cards, math flashcards, and leveled readers. District personnel made home deliveries to families who were not able to pick up materials from the schools.

The ASCENT teacher candidates added both depth and breadth to the interdisciplinary STEM teaching team. The school-based teacher educators included a grade 4-8 generalist as well as a Career and Technical Education (CTE) teacher with a concentration in instructional technology. The two ASCENT teacher candidates included two kinesiology majors, one with a biology minor and one with a history minor. The team decided to focus on the topic of COVID-19 and pandemics. They investigated the history of pandemics, how viruses reproduce, and how scientists model the spread of these diseases. The students at home as well as the instructors created 3D models of the coronavirus. They also were able to have a virtual guest speaker from TAMU-CC. This professor was on the local COVID-19 taskforce responsible for modeling data and making recommendations to government officials regarding strategies to minimize the spread of this fatal disease. One advantage of remote learning is that it creates more opportunities for communication with experts outside of the classroom (Fulton, 2020). Many guest speakers wouldn't have the time for in-person visits but are willing to share remotely without having to travel (Lambert & Rennie, 2021). As was evidenced by the feedback from parents, students, teacher candidates, and school-based teacher educators, this relevant, collaborative experience resulted in powerful learning for all.

Since the partner district's summer school did not begin until the middle of July, Dr. Lopez conducted virtual daily classes with the teacher candidates from 9:00am-12:00pm for two consecutive weeks. The daily schedule consisted of introducing the components of lesson design, researching effective ways to implement and formatively and summatively assess their lessons with their school-based teacher educators, as well as ensuring the teacher candidates had adequate knowledge of the teaching competencies. From the perspective of Dr. Lopez, these ten days were intense but were extremely vital to the success of the field-based experience. Each teacher candidate was then assigned a school-based teacher educator that most closely matched their certification area. The teacher candidates attended the virtual summer school class Monday-Thursday from 8:00am-12:30pm for twelve consecutive days. Depending on the content area, each virtual summer school class looked different. However, the expectations were obvious: all students had their cameras on; all students participated in the lesson, either by having oral discussions with the teacher or placing responses and/or comments in the chat box; and all students completed tasks given to them daily. Additionally, the partner district allowed full access for Dr. Lopez to enter any designated virtual classroom in order to observe the teacher candidates. In order to meet the expectations for completion of the field-based component, each teacher candidate was expected to teach two virtual lessons. Before any teacher candidate was approved to teach the lesson, they had to have a coaching session with Dr. Lopez and the school-based teacher educator. These coaching sessions were conducted virtually at a mutually convenient time. This added to the accessibility and flexible nature of the course. In addition to having the opportunity to observe and participate in delivering instruction, teacher candidates often stayed online after class ended in order to plan for the next day. According to the candidates, this helped create a sense of ownership and fostered a relationship between the candidate and school-based teacher educator.

Because the partner school's virtual summer program was Monday through Thursday, Dr. Lopez was able to hold class virtually with the teacher candidates on Fridays from 9:00am-12:00pm. During this Friday class, the candidates had time to reflect on their week by considering the challenges and opportunities associated with teaching virtually, behavior patterns, and lesson delivery. Without this unique opportunity, the teacher candidates would have entered clinical teaching with minimal virtual teaching experience. These five weeks prepared the teacher candidates for a successful transition to the virtual classrooms that they would encounter during their Clinical Teaching II semester in the fall.

Participant Perspectives

The ASCENT participants were a diverse group both in terms of background experience, ethnicity, and future aspirations. The group included six teacher candidates who were earning certification in EC-12 (one SPED, one music; one Kinesiology/English, one Mathematics/Kinesiology, one Biology/Kinesiology; and one Social Studies/Kinesiology) and six teacher candidates who were earning certifications in EC-6 Core Subjects. The candidates represented diverse perspectives. The group included students who attended college directly after high school, as well as several teacher candidates that came to teaching as a second career. There were candidates that had their own children, while others were still living at home. Candidates identified as Hispanic, African-American, White, and Biracial. This diversity allowed for a wide array of perspectives, resulting in more robust data. Qualitative data collected from all stakeholders – Dr. Lopez, the teacher candidates, the school-based teacher educators, and the partnership liaison – included open-ended responses, journal entries, and final evaluations.

University-Based Teacher Educator Perspective

Dr. Lopez has twenty years of experience in the education field: fifteen years as a public education teacher; two years as a school administrator; and three years of experience in higher education. However, despite the abundance of experience, she felt uncomfortable entering the uncharted waters of remote teaching, because her virtual teaching experience, up to that point, had been extremely limited. In order to best meet the needs of her students and to grow professionally, Dr. Lopez immersed herself in all relevant meetings with the partner district, as well as attending the professional developments offered by the district to the teaching staff. Dr. Lopez noted that preparing for the experience was, “much more work than I had done in my previous roles as an educator and administrator. However, the relationship that exists between the university and district made the entire process both meaningful and thoughtful.”

Once the summer school session began, Dr. Lopez was given access to each teachers' and teacher candidates' Google classroom. Teacher candidates were aware Dr. Lopez would be observing the virtual classrooms. Every virtual classroom was visited every single day for approximately ten minutes. These visits were unannounced and discreet with the camera and speaker turned off. Dr. Lopez noted in her observations occurring during these visits that there were meaningful and interactive discussions taking place between the school-based teacher educator, the teacher candidate, and the students. Dr. Lopez stated the following: “It was obvious that all teacher candidates started the day with an enthusiastic demeanor and ended the day knowing they were making a difference in the lives of students during a time of a lot of uncertainty.” All students were visible with their cameras on and were engaged in the discussion and learning that was taking place. The grades represented ranged from kindergarten to eighth grade. There was an array of different technology tools being used, including but not limited to

Jamboard, Nearpod, and Seesaw. There were a few students that needed to be redirected, which was done by either the school-based teacher educator or teacher candidate without disruption to the rest of the class. The chat feature was utilized in several classrooms which offered students the opportunity to “voice” their answer or “choose” the correct answer.

Overall, the presence of two adults in the virtual classroom, the school-based teacher educator and the teacher candidate, appeared to have an extremely positive effect. While the school-based teacher educator taught, the teacher candidate was there to ensure students’ questions were being addressed. These two sets of eyes were clearly beneficial for all students. When the teacher candidate was delivering their lessons, the roles were reversed. During these occasions, the school-based teacher educator was now the one acknowledging students’ questions. This played out in every classroom observed. The school-based teacher educator relied on the teacher candidate and the teacher candidate relied on the school-based teacher educator.

Teacher Candidate Perspectives

The teacher candidates offered their perspectives regarding the virtual summer school session. These perspectives were collected through open-ended questions, journal entries, and their final course evaluations. The responses provide a detailed account of how the teacher candidates felt about participating in a virtual field-based experience.

For example, when teacher candidates were asked to respond to how this field-based experience pushed them out of their comfort zone, seven out of the twelve teacher candidates responded positively. One teacher candidate stated, “I was able to come out of my shell and give my [school-based teacher educator] pointers of what I believed we could do better. I also got the opportunity to form different warm-up (discussion) questions with the students and (provide opportunities for them to) discuss their thoughts.” Another teacher candidate emphasized that she was pushed out of her comfort zone by having to create all plans virtually and by having to find ways to keep kids engaged online rather than face-to-face in the classroom. This sentiment was echoed by other teacher candidates as well. Many expressed their hesitancy with having to record themselves teaching online lessons. They reported feeling out of their comfort zone when having to go back and watch the lesson they taught online.

Teacher candidates were also asked how their perspectives changed regarding online instruction after having had this virtual experience. Eleven out of twelve teacher candidates reported that this virtual experience positively changed their perspective. In fact, one teacher candidate wrote, “It changed positively; it showed me that teachers are capable of teaching a lesson and engaging the students online if they just adjust to virtual online learning and change up their lessons.” Additionally, another teacher candidate stated she was skeptical at first, but, “overall I had a positive experience. We were still able to monitor the students and work with them where they needed it.” Several teacher candidates acknowledge that this experience gave them more confidence going into their clinical teaching semester, especially if this model was going to be their new norm. One of the secondary teacher candidates wrote the following about his perspective: “Through all of this I learned that online learning has every chance of being as effective as in-person classes if given the chance and teachers having the right kind of training.” Similarly, a primary teacher candidate shared her viewpoint by saying,

My perspective of online learning has changed in the sense that it is important for the students to have knowledge of computer skills and vocabulary so that it is easy for you to explain how to get places and make their learning more interactive.

There was one teacher candidate whose perspective did not align with the other teacher candidates. This teacher candidate stressed the fact that not all students and families have reliable internet service and/or devices that make online learning possible. The candidate also acknowledged that not all students have positive support systems at home, thus making it difficult for mastering learning objectives.

Teacher candidates were also asked to reflect on technology. They were asked if they had taken the lead on implementing any new technology into the virtual summer school class. Several teacher candidates reported they had the opportunity to not only implement new technology, but also create engaging and interactive activities utilizing technology. One candidate stated she had created her first Google form, along with interactive slides with website links that allowed for students to “transition smoothly from lessons and reviews to assignments and homework.” This same candidate expressed her enthusiasm when she was able to create an instructional screencast video to show students how to maneuver throughout their Google accounts and classroom: “I had so much fun leading this task. It made me feel like I was already a true teacher.” Another candidate made an effort to stay online after the virtual day concluded in order to show and teach her school-based teacher educator different ways to incorporate technology, such as integrating a Kahoot game and interactive websites, such as Nearpod and Epic Books for Kids.

When asked to reflect on what the most powerful takeaway from the virtual partnership was, teacher candidates had many positive perspectives. All teacher candidates agreed that learning how to teach in an online environment was the most beneficial takeaway. A teacher candidate expressed himself by writing the following: “Never give up. Teachers are some of the most determined and caring individuals in the world. In this time of uncharted waters, teachers everywhere are providing everything they can to keep students learning.” A similar sentiment was echoed by another teacher candidate:

One huge takeaway I had was knowing that I can still impact a student’s life over a video session. I can still be myself and be a great online teacher. Yes, you will have to get creative and at times technical difficulties will be present, but if you are patient and flexible you will be successful. Staying positive, being empathetic, and instilling a love of learning were also some of the powerful takeaways reported from teacher candidates.

On the last day of virtual summer schools, teacher candidates were asked to share what advice they would give to future field-based experience teacher candidates who are about to have a similar experience in a virtual setting. They expressed that they would let others know that asking for help is not a sign of weakness; navigating the virtual learning world does not happen overnight. Additionally, they would want future virtual teacher candidates to stay flexible and make sure to research the online programs they plan on using in order to create engaging lessons that students will enjoy. One teacher candidate summed it up by encouraging future field-based teacher candidates to be engaging and not afraid to make mistakes: “We learn from the mistakes and improve with every mistake. If you are scared and do not attempt to try, you will never get comfortable and familiar with this environment.”

The teacher candidates identified several challenges in their reflections. These included building relationships in a virtual environment, student engagement, and creating a warm and inviting physical environment when teaching remotely. They also shared that they were self-conscious about being recorded and having to see themselves on camera. By far the greatest challenge expressed was difficulties with technology, both their own and their students’ access and WiFi speed. When problems arose, it was hard to keep the lesson moving and the students

learning. At these times, they were especially grateful to have another adult to troubleshoot.

In summary, these perspectives represent a diverse group of teacher candidates who were able to make the best out of their field-based experience. Much of these viewpoints were reaffirmed and repeated on Fridays when Dr. Lopez conducted a virtual class with the teacher candidates.

School-Based Teacher Educator Perspectives

At the conclusion of the virtual summer session, school-based teacher educators were asked to provide their personal perspectives regarding their experience working with teacher candidates in a virtual learning environment. Their responses were gathered through a Google form.

One of the first questions asked was related to their confidence level: Did their confidence level change in regard to mentoring a field-based teacher candidate in a virtual setting? Several school-based teacher educators noted they were adjusting to this new normal and would be making mistakes alongside their teacher candidate; if mistakes were made then, together, they would learn how to fix them. One elementary school-based teacher educator reflected on her confidence level as follows:

I was very apprehensive about mentoring someone while I was at the early stages of navigating through the virtual classroom myself. I wondered if it was possible to help someone when I, myself, was experiencing this new reality. I was honest about my lack of experience with technology at this level. We had great discussions daily about what worked well and what didn't. I shared my experiences as best as I could, as well as my concerns regarding new obstacles. It was a learning experience for both of us, and my candidate was amazing. My confidence definitely changed in a positive way.

The consensus among the school-based teacher educators showed their confidence level improved as the virtual summer session progressed.

The school-based teacher educators were also asked what their most powerful takeaway from this virtual partnership was with their teacher candidate. A handful of school-based teacher educators stated that having the opportunity to learn side-by-side with their teacher candidate was powerful. It showed they were both on the same "playing field." Having the ability to learn new technology platforms together helped foster a great relationship, noted one secondary school-based teacher educator. If the lesson was not successful, both the teacher candidate and school-based teacher educator worked together to reflect, adjust, and try again.

As far as what their most positive aspect was of this type of virtual experience with their teaching candidate, school-based teacher educators reiterated the power of two adults in the virtual classroom. While the teacher candidate shared about technology, the school-based teacher educator was able to make connections about the similarities and differences of teaching in a remote versus face-to-face classroom. They shared that this experience gave them time to prepare for the upcoming year of uncertainty. One school-based teacher educator summarized her thoughts by saying, "building this positive relationship will definitely go beyond these three weeks."

Finally, the school-based teacher educators were asked what advice they would give to future field-based teacher candidates who were going to complete the clinical teaching experience in a virtual classroom. Several indicated the importance of the teacher candidate being patient with their teaching partner, especially around the use of technology. They stressed again the importance of building relationships both with the students and the school-based

teacher educator. They felt it was important to remember that everyone is learning and they want the teacher candidate to ask questions. In these times of uncertainty, the veteran school-based teacher educators were experiencing many of the same insecurities that the teacher candidates felt. The school-based teacher educators wanted the teacher candidates to take risks in sharing ideas and remain open to feedback. One school-based teacher educator summed it up by saying, “I guess the advice I would share is that it’s all trial and error in this virtual world. Make it as fun as possible.”

Partnership Perspectives

According to the qualitative data collected from the partner district during the professional development sessions and preplanning done in the beginning of the summer, the administrators and school-based teacher educators felt the teacher candidates overall had more technological knowledge and skills than their school-based teacher educators. This emphasized a greater need for a coteaching model, based on research emphasizing continual collaboration and the gradual release of responsibility over time between the school-based teacher educator and the teacher candidate, to be implemented as a mutually beneficial high impact practice during the short amount of time the summer session would be taking place (Bacharach et al., 2010; Heck & Bacharach, 2016; McIntyre et al., 2018). This coteaching model allowed one teacher to focus on delivering instruction, while the other teacher was able to troubleshoot technology issues, support students that were struggling, monitor progress, and provide feedback. Together the teacher candidates and their school-based teacher educators became problem-solving partners through the use of new platforms where they addressed issues of planning, engagement, formative and summative assessment, and navigating virtual classroom environments.

Not only were the elementary and secondary students able to benefit academically from the coteaching model, having two adults in the classroom meant an extra set of eyes and ears to attend to the emotional and social needs during this time as well. Several of the teacher candidates and school-based teacher educators used interactive tools such as Peardeck to check in with their students daily regarding how they were doing emotionally. If a student’s response to the check in raised any red flags, either the teacher candidate or the school-based teacher educators was able to follow up individually with that student, while the other continued teaching the rest of the class. Individual contact could occur through a private Google Meet or phone call. Many of these students’ families were impacted economically by the global pandemic, creating more instability and stress in the household. While the educators were concerned about academic learning loss, they also knew that building relationships with the students was critical. According to Morgan (2020), “during stressful times, heart and passion may be more important than the content needing to be covered” (p. 137). Having two adults modeling healthy relationships through their interactions and being available to listen to the students’ thoughts and concerns brought a bit of stability to the lives of these students during these times of uncertainty.

Future Implications

COVID-19 has forced schools and universities to reimagine how programs can continue to be successful despite uncertainties.

Preparation for the Unknown

COVID-19 was a strong reminder of the importance of preparing our students for what has not yet transpired. While most EPPs, as set forth by their state teaching standards, provide clinical experiences to their candidates, many are designed and carried out in a traditional setting involving the candidates assigned to respective campuses with respective mentors. However, when one element of the equation is missing, the EPP program has to have a continuation plan in place and be prepared to put in motion a seamless intervention in order to avoid a break in teaching and learning which may result in staggering student academic achievement gaps.

Virtual Learning Affords Opportunities

While all of the virtual classrooms benefited from having two sets of eyes and ears, the STEM classroom recognized additional opportunities afforded by this team teaching distance learning model. The teacher candidates brought expertise in science and history that the school-based teacher educators did not possess. In this case, both the students and teachers took on the role of learners. The learners were able to benefit from going on virtual field trips and being visited by cutting edge scientists that were influencing local decisions regarding the city's response to the COVID-19 virus. Even if the global pandemic was not a reality, connecting with these experts and going on these field trips face to face would be difficult due to constraints of time, money, and other logistics. Virtual learning forced teachers everywhere to think outside-of-the-box. As a result of this creative thinking, students were able to communicate with people outside the four walls of their school. These experiences will remain with both the students and teachers long after COVID-19 is eradicated.

Conclusion

The Education Preparation Program at TAMU-CC has cultivated university and community partnerships and operationalized clinical practice in order to develop a strong EPP program. It is through this cultivation and sharing of resources, funds of knowledge, first-, second- and third spaces, human capital, and the decision-making process that we have been able to build and sustain a program rich in reciprocity and mutually beneficial partnerships (NAPDS, 2021). Our students have been able to utilize the clinical settings at our partnership campuses to provide them with real-world, site-based classroom experiences congruent with the student populations and school climate and culture of what will likely be their first few years of teaching. These authentic clinical experiences are mutually planned, developed and executed between the various members of the partnerships, such as the boundary-spanning school-based teacher educators, university-based teacher educators, teacher candidates, and administrators, in order that an authentic experience takes place. The collective efforts of the partnerships helped address the preparation shortcomings that became apparent due to COVID-19, but most importantly, provided a platform for redesigning and implementing a program that was now able to meet the needs of a virtual and online teaching and learning environment.

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