Educator Preparation Program: In Times of Crisis

Faculty Preparation

Pandemic Exposed Shortcomings

The pandemic's near overnight disruption highlighted various known inequities across education. The lack of consistent educator preparation in the use of technology and online pedagogy has existed for decades. While standards for educator preparation in online settings exist, there is a need for faculty to be prepared to effectively design, integrate, and model these pedagogical practices in educator preparation programs.

Lessons Learned that Can Continue

It is clear we are entering a new era in education and educators should be prepared for the modern age. To make this happen schools and colleges of education are going to be required to develop educators who are prepared to effectively use a variety of technologies in the process of their teaching. Faculty members should be prepared and required to effectively integrate technology in their classrooms, including the exploring of blended and online modes of learning. We have moved beyond having the single faculty member or a few "technology" faculty members who teach candidates "technology." Years of research have found the single class on technology use is not effective in developing modern educators. Programs should ensure they are threading the Teacher Education and Technology Competencies (TETCs) and design frameworks such as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), throughout their curriculums.

Recomendations and Roadmap

Assess and develop an understanding for where your students are receiving the skills to teach in online, hybrid, and other digital settings. Decades of research has shown a single course approach to "learning to use technology" does not model the skills needed to support effective teaching. Use a variety of informal and formalized methods to measure faculty understanding, attitudes, competency, and use of digital technology and associated pedagogy in their own teaching. Work beyond the boundaries of pre-established units within your college or school to ensure students have the required skills. Use the pandemic to overcome the barriers of old (e.g., course ownership, required courses for historic reasons, a single professor teaching one course) and develop new ways of doing. Consider developing stranded approaches, modules, summer/fall/winter bootcamps, co-teaching where your technology innovators and early adopters are supporting both faculty and students in learning new technologies and pedagogical practices. Overcome the desire to give all faculty members the latest technology with hopes they will use it in their teaching. Adoption and understanding of technology is more than acquiring and use. Focus on educating faculty and students on the essence of technology rather than a step-by-step use of a technology.

Checklist for Consideration

- Prepare all faculty in the use of technology to a minimum proficiency.
- Integrate technology literacy in teaching and learning throughout the curriculum in schools of education.
- Consider new pedagogical and technological course designs.

Resources

https://aurora-institute.org/resource/inacol-national-standards-for-quality-online-teaching-v2/

http://udlguidelines.cast.org/

http://udloncampus.cast.org/home

http://site.aace.org/tetc/

https://detaresearch.org/

Field Placements

Pandemic Exposed Shortcomings

Teacher preparation programs depend on partnerships with local school divisions to provide high quality field placements for future educators, therapists, and specialists. This has always been for the programs' and divisions' mutual benefit, although at times it has seemed as though programs are more dependent upon the school divisions (due to division policies and placement availability considerations). The abrupt closing of preK-12 schools around the country this spring left tens of thousands of student teachers scrambling to finish their clinical experiences and accumulate hours for licensure. Fortunately, most state departments of education and teacher prep programs worked collaboratively to help students finish their clinical work as best they could and made exceptions to licensure requirements wherever necessary. As school divisions grapple with their own issues regarding how to reopen their schools, it is not certain that all divisions will treat high quality field placements for student teachers as an urgent priority. It is hoped state boards of education will impress upon school districts that they should continue to support the development of the next generation of teachers.

Lessons Learned that Can Continue

Lean into the present opportunity. Work closely with field partners to understand their needs during these unprecedented times. Establish working groups with school leaders to hear their concerns and wishes. Utilize technology options - advanced and simple - to permit candidates opportunity to practice teaching. Use this opportunity to learn about the Teacher Education and Technology Competencies (TETCs) and work to infuse technology across all program courses and field placements.

Recomendations and Roadmap

The COVID-19 pandemic caught everyone by surprise and ushered in a new era of education with online instruction at the forefront. While online education existed prior to COVID-19, most teacher preparation programs did not explicitly prepare students for working in that environment via coursework or field experiences. Some recommendations include:

1. Consider adding to methods and other courses instruction around how use of practices being taught could be implemented in the virtual environment. This connects to recommendation
2. Provide at least one field placement that includes a virtual component.
3. Work with local districts and online schools to identify field placements that include an online component and have strong mentors who can support teacher candidates.

Checklist for Consideration

- Meet with school division partners to reconnect and commit to collaboratively developing clinical experiences of all kinds (in-person, hybrid, virtual).
- Share creative new ideas for field experiences, coursework, training, and professional development, including the use of virtual alternatives and simulations.
- Identify courses that can be enriched by adding instruction in best practices for virtual learning environments, and provide virtual field experiences.
- Recruit greater numbers of strong mentor teachers, especially those most able to support student teachers in virtual learning environments.
- Ensure that school division professional development for teachers, especially in regards to the use of division learning platforms, is available to students in teacher prep programs.
- Ensure that university professional development for faculty, especially in regards to adapting coursework to a virtual environment, is available to mentor teachers in preK-12 schools.

Resources

http://teachlive.org

www.mursion.com

Digital Tools

Pandemic Exposed Shortcomings

The sudden shift from face-to-face to fully online created a need for digital tools and solutions. Suddenly, faculty unaware and sometimes unequipped to use digital tools for instruction were dependent upon these same technologies to plan and design instruction and subsequent student learning. Lack of knowledge on everything from the "how tos" of a technology platform (e.g., learning management systems) to what digital resources were applicable to an instructional need, faculty were left with immediately having to identify a digital tool, understand how it works, plan and design instruction with the tool, and then implement it for their instruction. In the end, instructional decisions were often not made based on synchronous or asynchronous designs specific to the curriculum or content of an instruction day, but instead, on a digital tool(s) and its parameters. These limitations had a direct impact on the quality of instruction provided to our students during an incredibly stressful time.

Lessons Learned that Can Continue

The reliance on digital tools to facilitate instruction at a distance remains a constant. Yes, hybrid options exist but even here, faculty need to determine the appropriate digital solution and gain competency to ensure effective instructional use. Universities and colleges have invested in personnel and infrastructure to support faculty in the use of digital tools in their instruction. Since the pandemic, many of these entities have enlarged their staffs, made investments in additional digital tools, and attempted to support the use and application of these tools in online and hybrid instruction. Faculty members can rely on supportive expertise to further plan and design the effective integration of these digital tools in their instruction. The application of these tools in teacher preparation coursework offers faculty the opportunity to model effective practice of these tools for preservice teacher education students subsequent preK-12 implementation.

Reccomendations and Roadmap

As many educators, PreK-12 and those in higher education realize, there are countless digital tools and solutions that can be used in instruction. As we move forward, educators need to focus not on the digital tool but rather how they desire to plan and design instruction for all their learners. They need to continue to ask and answer the questions specific to how best to address their curriculum, how they want to model effective practices, the manner in which they want to facilitate and promote discussion, and the list goes on. Through this focus and related planning, determination of what digital tools to use, which of the varied tools will be helpful, and how best to integrate these tools into course instruction will become apparent.

Checklist for Consideration

- Provide faculty with access and training to digital tools on a regular basis.
- Equip classrooms to be able to support in person and mixed f2f instruction.
- Ensure that digital tools aren't purchased for the sake of the tool itself.
- Support faculty, with instruction and tools, to choose the best match for the content, pedagogy, and technology.

Resources

https://upcea.edu/joint-response-regarding-covid-19-and-advice-on-transitioning-face-to-face-courses-online/

https://sites.google.com/view/covid19he/home

https://onlinelearningconsortium.org

https://www.learningkeepsgoing.org/free-tech-for-learning

Equity and Access

Pandemic Exposed Shortcomings

Though Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) transitioned to digital and remote learning much easier than their K-12 counterparts, it does not mean that the move has been without its challenges. What happens when students are not allowed on campus and cannot use university-owned devices or university-owned broadband networks to complete assignments? What happens is it creates problems of equity and access. Unfortunately, the students who are least likely to own their own laptop or tablet are under-resourced students, students of color, students attending HBCUs and other MSIs, and students who live in rural areas. This is also true for broadband access. Many times, IHEs that serve these populations of students are funded less when compared to other institutions that are predominantly white, wealthier, or IHEs in major cities.

Lessons Learned that Can Continue

Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) have long been pioneers of distance learning and virtual education; however, it is evidenced by the higher education "homework gap" that just because institutions have been prepared for online learning does not mean that their students are prepared. Students, particularly students of color, are under-resourced to take advantage of these distance learning opportunities. Being that digital learning will continue to be a part of teaching and learning at the higher education level for the foreseeable future, IHE's must continue be aware of this issue and find ways to meet the needs of students who need it most.

Recomendations and Roadmap

One of the things that can be done is to survey students on their access to an Internet-ready device with needed applications (such as Word or Google Docs) on which they can do their work, broadband access to connect to the Internet, and an environment conducive to learning where they can complete their work. Knowing which students have access is key to understanding how colleges and universities should pivot resources during this pandemic. In addition to knowing what resources are available, colleges and universities must provide training and development to not only faculty who do not normally teach online, but to students who do not normally learn online as well. Whenever possible it will be helpful to offer one-to-one assistance to students. It is not safe to assume that students will retain learning principles in a singular online learning format. IHEs should encourage faculty and staff to use a varied approach to teaching and the dissemination of information, understanding that all problems will not go away for students just because a device or broadband are provided. Lastly, communicate with students throughout to understand how they are adjusting to the new learning formats.

Checklist for Consideration

- Assess the technology access and environmental needs of students.
- Provide appropriate training for both faculty, staff, and students on digital learning technologies.
- Identify solutions to provide access to broadband for students.
- Develop a process for access to technology solutions for students, including working and easy to use digital devices and applications.
- Share potential solutions for students in locating study environments conducive to online learning (e.g., public libraries).
- Consider under resourced students and students in rural areas when assigning work digitally"

Resources

https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07D2364N5/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?_encoding=UTF8&btkr=1

https://www.learningkeepsgoing.org/education-coalition#filter=.centering-equity

https://armchairexpertpod.com/pods/heather-mcghee

https://educationvotes.nea.org/2020/04/15/six-things-congress-must-still-do-to-protect-students-families-during-covid-crisis/

Economics of the New Normal

Pandemic Exposed Shortcomings

The pandemic hit colleges and universities with a one-two punch of fiscal problems. As students left campuses revenue was lost from room and board plans. Additionally, the pandemic caused widespread unemployment resulting in decreased tax revenue collected by the states and a decrease in funding for state schools. Private schools felt a similar decrease due to a decrease in money available for tuition and gifts. All of this is occurring right before a looming drop-off in the number of students that will be graduating high school and will lead to an overall decline in university enrollments.

Lessons Learned that Can Continue

This tightening of the fiscal belt will not be eased in the foreseeable future. Right about the time the economy may start to bounce back there will be fewer college aged students to go around to all the universities. The role of adjunct faculty will have to be carefully examined. While they can provide the most cost-effective means for instruction they are also the most vulnerable faculty to economic crisis. There may need to be an examination of a new normal of the professorial three-legged stool of scholarship-service-teaching that would tip the balance even further in the direction of teaching.

Recomendations and Roadmap

Moving forward, colleges of education should continue to look for ways to be more fiscally conservative. Long range plans may include finding technological solutions to reduce the unique needs in colleges of education for faculty to be in classrooms observing teacher candidates. Faculty will need to be creative in finding effective methodologies for larger course enrollments that still allow for the affordances of pedagogies such as peer teaching and modeling of research-based practices.

Checklist for Consideration

- Sequence programs in cohorts to reduce off schedule students needing low enrolled courses.
- Provide professional development in using technology to observe teacher candidates.
- Provide professional development on effective pedagogy for larger course sizes.
- Provide faculty with clear expectations on the reduction of scholarship and service if teaching expectations are increased

Resources

https://www.ncsl.org/research/education/higher-education-responses-to-coronavirus-covid-19.aspx

https://edprepmatters.net/2020/06/keeping-an-eye-on-covid-19-relief-the-education-workforce/

This resource was created by the COVID-19 Education Coalition Higher Education working group, including:

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Digital Promise, Educational Testing Service, National Education Association, National Research Center for Distance Education and Technological Advancements, National Technology Leadership Summit, Society for Information Technology and Teacher Education, and Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children.