Challenges and Strategies for Facilitating On-line Practicum Experience for In-service Teachers

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Abstract: The presentation discusses important instructional strategies for facilitating on-line practicum experiences for in-service teachers. Topics including the use of collaborative learning communities and project-based activities within the structures of a practicum experience designed for in-service special educators that were facilitated on-line. Data related to the effectiveness of the components of the practicum and teachers’ implementation of best practices resulting from practicum experience will also be presented.

Learner Outcomes:
Participants will:
- Understand the effective components of an on-line practicum experience.
- Understand the benefits and challenges of using the on-line environment to facilitate practicum experiences
- Apply information from the discussion to create an on-line practicum experience related to course content for in-service teachers

In order to determine what methods are most effective in preparing future special education teachers, a new emphasis is being placed on researching effective teacher preparation strategies. Changes are being proposed and implemented in the way teachers are initially prepared as well as the way they participate in ongoing professional growth activities during their teaching careers (Dudzinski, Roszmann-Millican, & Shank, 2000). One way that teacher education programs are changing is in the media utilized to facilitate coursework and professional growth activities. On-line delivery of coursework has become an exciting and dynamic way to facilitate teacher growth and learning.

The purpose of this presentation is to demonstrate and discuss the effective facilitation of a practicum experience in an on-line environment. The presentation will allow participants to see how research-based components of quality teacher education can be integrated into the structured practicum experience. The presentation will focus on allowing participants to gain an understanding of how to incorporate best practices teacher education into an on-line delivery format for practicum experiences. These components include each of the qualities suggested by Howard (2002): meaningful activities, expert guidance, and collaborative learning communities. The practicum structure that will be demonstrated also utilizes research-based practices including embedding instruction in teacher daily tasks (Lang & Fox, 2004). These qualities can be thought of as components of best practices teacher education and professional development activities because they facilitate change in everyday teaching practices.

In addition, results from a study demonstrating the effectiveness of the on-line practicum will be presented. This practicum design allows teachers to immediately apply new concepts from the course in their field experience, encouraging them to make changes in their domain of practice. The design includes a peer coaching component that helps form a collaborative learning community for the practicum teacher that can encourage, assist, and learn along with the teacher enrolled in the practicum as they move through the experience. This collaborative learning community has allowed teachers who participated in the practicum to share ideas with teachers across the state who teach in schools with radically different socioeconomic, racial, cultural, and geographic differences. This sharing across groups is another advantage of utilizing the on-line practicum format.

Participants will leave with an understanding of the challenges and benefits of facilitating an on-line practicum experience as well as an example structured practicum that they can adapt to implement in their own teacher education program. A majority of the presentation time will be allotted for interactive discussion and questions from the participants to allow opportunities for them to make connections to their own programs.
References

