TEXAS PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION: HYBRID METHODS COURSE MODEL IMPLEMENTATION

Emily K. Reeves, Ph.D.
Midwestern State University

Christina Janise McIntyre, Ph.D.
Midwestern State University

Aliyah Christian, BSIS
Midwestern State University

Daphney L. Curry, Ph.D.
Midwestern State University

Austin Kureethara Manuel, Ph.D.
Midwestern State University

Abstract

With a movement toward a more flexible educational experience, courses have been developed that possess synchronous and asynchronous features as well as both online and face-to-face components. Although the use of online and hybrid platforms is very common, it is not as frequently used in courses that feature internships and clinical experiences such as field placements and clinical teaching situations for individuals training to be teachers. Not all that common in preservice teacher (PST) education, the hybrid model has shown a high level of promise, allowing students to receive quality content instruction while allotting them more time working in the field with expert inservice teachers. The hybrid model was developed to be flexible and meet the needs of the PST. Yet, ongoing, quality, and reciprocal professional development for all participants was a driving force for the online content development. This has resulted in a successful hybrid model for training teachers.

Keywords: hybrid methods, T-TESS, field experience, Texas certification exams

The trend of universities offering online courses and totally online programs has dramatically increased in the last several years. Now, it is not uncommon for universities to be completely online and free from the brick-and-mortar model altogether. The popularity of online coursework is due to its usefulness to non-traditional as well as traditional students in higher education (Dolan, 2009). Mostly asynchronous in nature, not only does online coursework allow traditional students greater flexibility when scheduling academic courses, it has also allowed non-traditional students to complete undergraduate degrees as well as seek graduate credentials. With its steadily increasing popularity, a focus on quality instruction has helped ensure the caliber of content delivered online remains high. However, one enduring and common complaint among teachers and students about online courses has been the lack of connection and engagement among students and instructors (Bolliger et al., 2019; Dolan, 2009; Sanga, 2018). This area of concern is being addressed by advancements in technology such as increased accessibility to high-speed internet, quality digital video formats, video response discussion platforms, and widely available inexpensive or free file-sharing programs. These have increased the engagement capabilities of online courses, making the platform more effective and more satisfying for those seeking a more interactive experience (Bolliger et al., 2019; Brunken, 2019; Casarez et al., 2019). With this online shift and a movement toward a more flexible educational experience, courses have been developed that possess synchronous and asynchronous features as well as both online and face-to-face components. Hybrid courses, as they are called, allow for flexibility for both students and professors because face-to-face components can be synchronously delivered

through virtual meeting software or asynchronously through recorded videos and other methods like video response platforms (Hass & Joseph, 2018; Lei & Lei 2019; Tuckman, 2002). Although the use of online and hybrid platforms is very common, it is not as frequently used in courses that feature internships and clinical experiences as in the case of field placements and clinical teaching situations for individuals training to be teachers. Despite the need for flexible formats to accommodate learners, the course delivery associated with internships and clinical placements has remained traditional and largely unchanged. This is in large part due to the fact that these types of courses not only possess a face-to-face internship component but also coursework to prepare for the internship experience as well as in-time supplementary activities to support fieldwork. However, courses that feature field experiences that require both an instructional component as well as time in a clinical setting can benefit enormously from the hybrid format (Hurlbut, 2018). Although not all that common in preservice teacher (PST) education, the hybrid model has shown a high level of promise, allowing students to receive quality content instruction while allotting them more time working in the field with expert inservice teachers.

Feedback from stakeholders involved in the traditional secondary methods course model conducted in the professional development school (PDS) setting demonstrated clear frustration with the traditional course mode of delivery. This mode of delivery traditionally entailed dividing PST time between their university class and time in the field teaching pre-school through 12th grade (P-12) students and working with inservice teachers. With this information, a hybrid secondary methods course model was designed and delivered to address the concerns of all parties involved and with the aim of increasing the instructional quality of the coursework, maximizing the benefits of the field placement, and ensuring the positive impact on the P-12 students with which the PSTs work. The hybrid model yielded dramatically different results from the traditional model, and feedback from various data collection points, methods students, and PDS mentor teachers demonstrate its efficacy and potential for additional positive growth.

The Hybrid Model

According to the Education Department's National Center for Education Statistics, while enrollment across the country in higher education has declined as a whole, enrollment in online courses has increased (2018). For many students, online courses are more feasible because they allow flexibility for interns to gain experience while attending to work and outside responsibilities (Ortagus & Tanner, 2019). While this trend is growing, teacher preparation is in a unique situation because of the opportunity to blend both online learning and internship obligations using a hybrid model for teacher preparation. Particularly during the two semesters leading up to clinical teaching or full-year internship when content and pedagogical instruction is still a major component of the coursework, PSTs enrolled in a hybrid teacher preparation program can fulfill the content expectations online while spending more intensely focused time working with P-12 students in their classrooms gaining experience.

In accordance with best practices in school-university partnerships, a school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community (National Association of Professional Development Schools, 2008) plays a critical role in this model. Traditionally, PSTs spend about half of their semester in the field with P-12 students and teachers and the other half in classrooms with professors working on content prior to clinical teaching. Our school-university partnership committee met and agreed that 100 percent of the semester would be more beneficial in terms of having PSTs in the P-12 classroom working with students and working alongside expert, inservice teachers. As the hybrid model allows PSTs more time, their experience includes tutoring, involvement in school-community events, and traditional P-12 classroom work. The outcome has resulted in students doubling the hours of experience in the field. The feedback from PSTs continues to be very positive, as exemplified by this quote, "I felt like I developed relationships with the students and my mentor by being in the field regularly. This model helped with my teaching."

Additionally, this model allows time for mentors and PSTs to engage in co-teaching. Co-teaching is a model that provides specific structures for mentors and PSTs to collaborate meaningfully in order to maximize the potential of the field teaching experience. The PST shadows the

mentor and collaborates using six specific strategies, allowing the mentor teacher to serve as the expert and scaffold for skill acquisition in a gradual release of responsibility for the PST. The model is meant to create more of an apprentice model as opposed to a sink or swim situation for the PST. Seven components of co-teaching include: 1) One Teach, One Observe, 2) One Teach, One Assist, 3) Station Teaching, 4) Parallel Teaching, 5) Supplemental Teaching, 6) Alternative/Differentiated Teaching, and 7) Team Teaching (Cook & Friend, 1995). Comments taken from course surveys demonstrate this. One PST stated, "Practicing with the different co-teaching models helped me feel more involved, and I never felt like I was just there to observe."

Not only was the hybrid model developed to be flexible and meet the needs of the PSTs, ongoing, quality, and reciprocal professional development for all participants was a driving force for the online content development. Not only did PSTs need online content support, but mentor teachers also needed professional development for mentoring and co-teaching support. For mentor teachers, they were given access to a one-stop website for mentor teacher support. For PSTs, the content was delivered using the online learning platform used by the university for both traditional face-to-face and online courses. This allowed students to track their progress using the grade book in the learning management system they were already familiar with, which helped ease their natural worries about grades and focus on their actual development as a teacher. The main features, comprising both synchronous and asynchronous aspects, of the online learning platform utilized were discussion tools, quizzes, reading assignments, and written assignment submission.

Components of the Hybrid Model

The following are featured in the current hybrid model discussed in the previous section. The hybrid format has three main areas that are important to address. Course content, communication, and the clinical internship component are discussed in further detail below.

Course Content

Course content was delivered in various ways, both synchronously and asynchronously. Instructors created and posted instructional videos to accompany the course textbook. The course textbook focused on current English language arts and reading (ELAR) pedagogy as well as cross-curricular literacy strategies. Synchronous mini-workshops on targeted topics were hosted by students and professors alike. Students created Google sites to display coursework so that their work became a dynamic living portfolio that they could access for use even after the course was completed and they no longer could get access to the course in the learning management system. Students were encouraged to put any tools, strategies, and ideas from their field experience as well as assignments on the site for later reference. A pacing guide was provided for students to follow, but they had autonomy over their schedule as field demands for individual students varied.

Literature circles delivered in blog format increased student collaboration and connectedness as well as modeled best practice content pedagogy. The in-person literature circle was adapted for online learning, and students "met" weekly, synchronously or asynchronously, to complete literature circle tasks. This also served as a model for students who may one day need to transition face-to-face in class literature circles to an online setting.

Self-paced Texas licensure tools such as Certify Teacher with interactive study methods and practice quizzes were included and allowed students to prepare for their upcoming exams. This was accompanied by a planning and pacing guide so students could set completion goals tailored to their specific scheduling needs.

Students received unit planning instruction, and the assignment was structured in such a way that students were in collaborative teams to create their own cross-curricular literacy-rich mini-unit. This collaboration not only gave them the benefit of working with peers to maximize learning when planning the unit, but it also provided another opportunity for peer connection that helped support students in the field placement. Students were given various platforms readily available within the context of the existing learning management system with which to collaborate. Students could use Zoom, Google Hangout, Google Meet, and course discussion boards.

Communication

Online discussion topics were assigned as part of the course content, but the topics were primarily meant to provide a forum for collaborative teacher talk. Preservice

teachers really appreciated the discussion board feature as one PST reported on her course reflection form, "I loved the discussion boards because we were in the field with our classes but also got to discuss what we were doing with our peers." The online discussion topics were designed to mimic the same kind of collaborative conversations that inservice teachers have in which they share pedagogical and management strategies. PSTs could bounce ideas around and talk about problems they were experiencing and share problem-solving techniques. The discussions also helped create a sense of community even though students were in the field and may be placed on different campuses. Typically, during the field placement time, students wouldn't necessarily be in contact with one another, so the discussions helped keep them connected to an additional support system in addition to the professor and mentor teacher.

For mentor teachers, a website, mentioned in further detail below, was created specifically for them that included training and support videos, forms, guidelines, contact information, and additional supports.

Pre- and post-synchronous teaching conferences with instructors could have been held in person but were mostly conducted using virtual meeting software such as Zoom, which allowed for location flexibility. This became even more valuable for social distancing purposes as in-person restrictions increased. For immediate communication, instead of waiting until students accessed their online course, a communication app, Remind, was used to broadcast important announcements to the whole class or communicate with one student in particular.

As an alternative to in-person pre-placement meetings with mentor teachers and administrators or cumbersome emails, which take up valuable time, mentors and administrators were provided with a central location for all pertinent information via a Google site that was shared with all involved parties. This site contained a placement calendar, forms, student handbooks, contact information for university supervisors, policy documents, mentor expectations, and helpful tips. The site also features co-teaching training videos and information to help new mentors learn about the co-teaching process, and experienced mentors review information as needed.

Clinical Internship

Video annotation was incorporated and dovetailed perfectly with the hybrid model as students in the field were able to record their teaching. GoReact, a video recording and annotation platform, allowed students to video their teaching and receive feedback from supervisors and peers when appropriate. Video annotation software holds the key to improving reflection, which is integral to the development of PSTs as GoReact allows for the documentation of critical features at specific and relevant points in the video which are documented and time stamped. This allows for an evidence-based reflection that is richer, more thorough, and more useful in improving practice. This type of tool provides scaffolding that is integral in the development of PSTs into successful practitioners. The use of video annotation software benefits preservice teachers in a myriad of ways and thusly aligns with the mission of educator preparation providers to prepare successful, reflective professionals using best practices. In GoReact, students can make specific connections in their teaching to the observation evaluation feedback provided by their supervisor. The visual connection of their teaching action paired with time-stamped feedback strengthens their ability to reflect and make significant changes in their classroom practice, leading to more significant improvement gains during the field experience. Because students could individually watch their teaching videos, view the feedback comments left by the instructor, and use that information for reflection, GoReact was an effective component for the hybrid model. In conjunction with the GoReact videos of their teaching, PSTs corresponding written lesson plans, lesson reflections, and formal teaching evaluations conducted by the university supervisor were submitted in a teaching portfolio to TK20, the college data collection system, at the conclusion of the placement.

Utilizing the data collection system TK20, mentors and PSTs could track and document time spent in the field for various purposes. PSTs used digital time log approvals to document observation and teaching field hours, allowing mentor teachers and instructors to track and verify individual students' time in the field. PSTs had the responsibility of creating the time logs and sending the verification emails to mentors. They were also responsible for making sure that they were accurate and approved in the system. Information about this aspect of the field placement

was also included in the mentor Google site provided to mentors at the first of the placement.

Lastly, all through the field placement, students were to collaborate with their mentor teachers by using the co-teaching models. PSTs were responsible for engaging in the co-teaching models starting the first week of the placement and were required to maintain and submit a log of all co-teaching dates, times, and strategies used throughout the internship.

Experience: Reflections from a Hybrid Model PST

Based on experience in Block B and clinical teaching, the hybrid model improves the overall effectiveness of preservice teachers' lessons, appropriate adjustment of future planning, and improved collaboration with the mentor teacher. The PST stated, "Spending more time in the field allowed me to be comfortable in the classroom. I got to know the students, and this made managing the classroom much easier. Working so much with the mentor and teaching more often than I would have without the extra time made me more confident in my abilities and made me improve a lot." Adding the video recording program to the hybrid model also increased the positive impact of the hybrid model. "During this pandemic, it has been extremely beneficial to not only to my mentor teacher and clinical supervisor but to me as well. I can quickly receive feedback and reflection." Video has the potential to help PSTs reflect upon and notice the impact of their actions in the classroom. Video allows PSTs to focus on specific components of their teaching, such as the impact of pedagogical decisions and their choice of management strategies. From watching themselves teach at different points in their learning process, they have the opportunity to develop critical reflective practices that help them move beyond shallow reflections based on recollections of what happened during a lesson in the past to recognizing and developing their abilities as teachers.

Discussion

Online delivery has often garnered criticisms on the part of both students and instructors because of its challenges to provide a cohesive and engaging environment due to the lack of interactions among the parties involved. In the ever-changing landscape of higher education, the hybrid model, when implemented in a systematic and thorough way, is just as successful and, in some arenas, even more beneficial than the traditional face-to-face format. This is especially true in terms of PST hours in the field and experience co-teaching. As online delivery and varied online degree options become more prevalent, and demands on traditional and non-traditional students increase, flexibility on the part of universities and education preparation providers will be the only way to stay relevant (Ortagus & Tanner, 2019). The recent pandemic has demonstrated that online course delivery options are a must when trying to accommodate the challenging situations that we have today that perhaps not an issue a decade ago. Also, hybrid delivery is more flexible and accommodating for today's learners and their unique situations. This small study demonstrates that students' learning during their methods field placement does not suffer through online course delivery. Also addressing common complaints of students not feeling connected was the professors' concerted effort to stay connected with students on every level. Teaching an online course requires

Mentor teachers were positive and displayed great enthusiasm in the field, particularly when referring to the traditional model. One mentor had a difficult time the year prior because of the time split and the confusion it caused with the bell schedule. After a semester with the hybrid model, she very enthusiastically stated, "This has been awesome! My preservice teacher is here more than required, and we are truly practicing the co-teaching model. This semester has been good for me also." Her point really highlights the mutually beneficial component of PDS and the hybrid's advantage of allowing for PSTs to have more time in the field.

Preservice teachers also appreciated the flexibility of the format as well as additional time working with students in the P-12 classrooms. As demonstrated in quotes earlier, PSTs felt they were able to establish better relationships with the P-12 students because they were there more often and on a more consistent basis. PST also indicated that they were able to establish a better rapport with their mentor teachers and better able to be involved in a true expert-novice internship experience. Another PST stated, "The extra and more consistent time in the placement let my mentor and I work together and use the different co-

teaching models. I really learned a lot from the experience."

Other points PSTs appreciated about the model aside from extra time in the field and more time teaching included the state test preparation options, optional Saturday workshops, and increased communication using Remind 101 and Zoom. PSTs felt there was increased time devoted to coursework focusing on content pedagogy. Additionally, lessons observed by university supervisors seem more student-centered and responsive and less scripted and mechanical, indicating, perhaps, the benefits of PSTs' strengthened relationships with students. This hybrid model will continue to evolve as we continue to collect data, analyze data, make informed changes to the model, and reflect in an ongoing research cycle to make

every effort to maximize our mutually beneficial relationship with our school district partners and provide the highest quality education to our PST.

References

Bolliger, D. U., Shepherd, C. E., & Bryant, H. V. (2019). Faculty members' perceptions of online program community and their efforts to sustain it. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 50*(6), 3283–3299. https://doiorg.databases.msutexas.edu/10.1111/bjet.12734

Brunken, J. (2019). Harness interactivity for e-learning. *TD: Talent Development, 73*(5), 77LT–80LT.

Cook, Lynne & Friend, Marilyn. (1995). Co-Teaching: Guidelines for creating effective practices. *Focus on Exceptional Children.* 28. 10.17161/fec.v28i3.6852.

Casarez, L., Agan, T., Self, R., Anderson, D., Atwood, A., & Heron, A. (2019). FlipGrid to enhance communication in distance education. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, *85*(4), 35–37.

Dolan, Kathleen. (2009). Student performance and satisfaction: Online vs. face to face. *Teaching Professor, 23*(4), 5–4.

 Hass, A., & Joseph, M. (2018). Investigating different options in course delivery - traditional vs online: is there another option? *International Journal of Information & Learning Technology, 35*(4), 230–239. https://doi-org.databases.msutexas.edu/10.1108/IJILT-09-2017-0096

Hurlbut, A. R. (2018). Online vs. traditional learning in teacher education: A comparison of student progress. *American Journal of Distance Education, 32*(4), 248–266. https://doi-org.databases.msutexas.edu/10.1080/08923647.2018.1509265

Lei, S. A., & Lei, S. Y. (2019). Evaluating benefits and drawbacks of hybrid courses: Perspectives of college instructors. *Education, 140*(1), 1–8.

National Association of Professional Development Schools. (2008). *Nine essentials.* Retrieved February 16, 2021, from https://napds.org/nine-essentials/

Ortagus, J. C., & Tanner, M. J. (2019). Going to college without going to campus: A case Study of online student recruitment. *Innovative Higher Education, 44*(1), 53–67. https://doi-org.databases.msutexas.edu/10.1007/s10755-018-9448-9

Remind. (2020). *Remind*. Remind. https://www.remind.com/

Sanga, M. W. (2018). Getting to master online teaching: Insights from purposefully organized course development training. *Quarterly Review of Distance Education, 19*(2), 15–25.

Simulados® Software, Inc. (2020). *Certify Teacher*. https://www.certifyteacher.com

Speakworks, Inc. (2018). *GoReact*. GoReact. https://get.goreact.com/

Tuckman, B. W. (2002). Evaluating ADAPT: A hybrid instructional model combining web-based and classroom components. *Computers & Education, 39*(3), 261. https://doi-org.databases.msutexas.edu/10.1016/S0360-1315(02)00045-3

Zoom Video Communications, Inc. (2020). *Video Conferencing, Web Conferencing, Webinars, Screen Sharing*. Zoom Video. https://zoom.us/