



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

INTEGRATED FIELD EXPERIENCES IN ONLINE TEACHER EDUCATION

A Natural Blend?

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National University is a fast-growing private university headquartered in San Diego, California. It currently enrolls approximately twenty-six thousand students, of whom about half are enrolled in teacher education. In terms of teacher education, about 30 percent of the students take the majority of their classes online.

Candidates in National University's online teacher education program carry out field activities as part of every class they take while in the program. Although sending preservice teacher education candidates into schools or other parts of communities is not a new enterprise, how such activities answer to interests of blended learning in online contexts has received little attention as an area of study or analysis. While integrated field experiences in online teacher education classes would seem to be a natural blend for effective learning, they occur because of influences as diverse as institutional commitment, state standards for teacher education, and policies and perspectives of professional teacher education organizations and individual faculty rather than through specific application of strategies for building effective blended learning.

This chapter examines integrated field experiences in National University's online teacher education program. These experiences are first examined as a function of the institutional enterprise and the state and professional mandates that influence their enactment (the context). Then we explore the blended learning tenets and the instructional strategies and practices that encompass those ideals

(the principles). Finally, we look at the conditions that mediate enactment of integrated field experiences as fully functional components of blended learning (the challenges).

Context

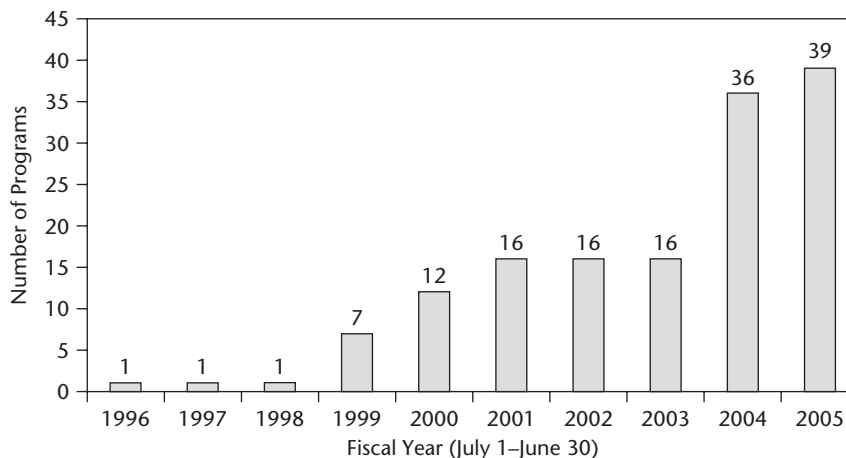
National University's dedication to online education stems in part from institutional commitments found in its core values of quality, access, relevance, accelerated pace, affordability, and community. When considering online education as an institutional enterprise, the key emphasis is access.

The university's mission statement supports making "lifelong learning opportunities accessible, challenging and relevant to a diverse population of adult learners [while facilitating] . . . educational access and academic excellence through . . . innovative delivery systems [that are] . . . responsive to technology . . . [and use] a diversity of instructional approaches." As a tuition-driven private nonprofit institution, National University's commitment to online education is also influenced by a correct reading of its adult students' learning needs and desires. The university currently offers nearly forty fully online programs across multiple disciplines (business administration, criminal justice, nursing, teaching credentials, forensic science) and has established a private entity, Spectrum Pacific Learning Company, to provide online development and support services. Accreditations from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC) and the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing endorse the online programmatic offerings while attesting to how institutional commitment and success in the online arena have been consistently developed and integrated. Figure 15.1 summarizes the rapid growth of online programs at National University over the past several years while providing an accounting of online growth from its inception in 1996.

Because of the growth in comprehensive online offerings by the university, Spectrum Pacific has also expanded its e-learning design and development activities to include a wider range of services to National University as well as to others interested in online development:

- E-learning consulting services
- E-learning training and workshops
- Content hosting and maintenance
- Content management
- 24/7 technical help desk services

Not surprisingly, since first offering courses online in 1996, there has been remarkable expansion in the National University student population choosing to

FIGURE 15.1. WASC-APPROVED ONLINE PROGRAMS.

take a portion or all of a degree program online. As Table 15.1 indicates, there has been a dramatic growth in the number of students who have enrolled in online courses over the last four years. Online program enrollment has increased to nearly half of all students taking at least one course in their program online, and 12 percent of all students complete their entire program online.

The fact that the Department of Teacher Education at National University accounts for roughly 50 percent of these descriptive statistics attests to its prominence among California institutions that recommend candidates for teaching credentials. It also highlights the role of National University in the field of online teacher education. In addition, during the 2004 fiscal year, for the first time, more teacher education candidates enrolled as online students than on-site students. Institutional commitments, student preferences, and enrollment demographics all contribute to providing an important context in which to examine blended learning within National University's online teacher education program.

As with many other online educational programs, National University's teacher education program is offered to candidates without regard to the geographical location of the candidate. So it is feasible that in any online teacher education class at the university, candidates from various global locations are present, though the vast majority are from California. Therefore, classes within the teacher education program have no on-site meeting requirements, but they do include requirements for field activities that are carried out in schools within each candidate's geographical location. Integrated field experiences result in each candidate's

TABLE 15.1. STUDENTS ENROLLED IN ONLINE COURSES, 2000–2004.

Students in Online Classes	FY 2000		FY 2001		FY 2002		FY 2003		FY 2004	
	Count	Percentage of Total	Count	Percentage of Total	Count	Percentage of Total	Count	Percentage of Total	Count	Percentage of Total
Students enrolled in at least one class online	4,692	18%	7,684	29%	10,352	39%	10,070	37%	11,366	45%
Students enrolled in a majority of classes online	763	3%	1,321	5%	6,326	24%	4,852	18%	7,260	29%
Students enrolled in all classes online	332	1%	792	3%	2,494	9%	1,314	5%	3,067	12%
Total active students	25,436		26,419		26,955		26,359		25,704	

making at least two visits to K-12 classrooms in every online teacher education class. Further interpretation and expansion of Table 15.1 data reveal that there are easily five thousand candidates taking at least some of their classes online. Such enrollment tendencies mean that as a programmatic enterprise, teacher education candidates make roughly thirty thousand classrooms visits each year as part of their integrated field activities.

Although online classes are taught by individual faculty, the field experiences for each class are coordinated through a statewide field experience coordinator, as well as local field experience coordinators in each of the nine centers across California where National University teacher education programs are offered. Candidates living outside California are held to the same field service requirements as those living within California; however, the responsibility for coordinating and carrying out the field activities rests primarily with individual candidates along with support from online faculty and the statewide field services coordinator.

Like many other teacher education programs, preservice teacher candidates at National University study the foundations of education as well as various methodologies of teaching, and also perform student teaching. Field experiences are integrated in the National University teacher education program curriculum and are designed to be increasingly complex. Early field experiences may have candidates observe instruction, attend school functions, or interview teachers, whereas later field experiences may require individual tutoring, small group tutoring, lesson observation, analysis and modification, and, ultimately, large group instruction and student teaching.

For reasons of program consistency and integrity as well as accreditation, the field experience program requirements are applicable regardless of whether courses are taken online or on-site. As with nearly all content that migrates from on-site to online delivery, content within National University's teacher education online courses contains threaded discussions that replace other forms of classroom participation present in on-site courses. Despite the use on interactive threaded discussions, far more individual rather than collaborative learning and teaching takes place when content is delivered online. Also, some online curricular modifications place content into more manageable clusters or chunks than the on-site versions. In addition, in online courses, on-screen text is broken up into visual mixes, and instruction is continuously available through instructor contact and technical support rather than the more traditional on-site course delivery method. But in all courses, whether online or on-site, two of the eight required tasks for each course have candidates perform field experiences. In some instances, up to half of the tasks in a course require information or reflection on aspects of field experiences. Clearly field experiences hold an established place in program design at National University, occurring consistently throughout the program in increasing complexity.

Field experiences are designed to develop candidate competence as evidenced in the Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs) from the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing. Divided into six domains, the thirteen TPEs establish arenas of teaching competencies while also serving as guideposts for program design and evaluation. To be recommended for a preliminary California teaching credential, candidates must demonstrate competence in domains A to F and the thirteen Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs), as detailed below:

- A. Making Subject Matter Comprehensible to Students
 - 1. Specific Pedagogical Skills for Subject Matter Instruction
- B. Assessing Student Learning
 - 2. Monitoring Student Learning During Instruction
 - 3. Interpretation and Use of Assessments
- C. Engaging and Supporting Students in Learning
 - 4. Making Content Accessible
 - 5. Student Engagement
 - 6. Developmentally Appropriate Teaching Practices
 - 7. Teaching English Language Learners
- D. Planning Instruction and Designing Learning Experiences for Students
 - 8. Learning About Students
 - 9. Instructional Planning
- E. Creating and Maintaining Effective Learning Environments for Student Learning
 - 10. Instructional Time
 - 11. Social Environment
- F. Developing as a Professional Educator
 - 12. Professional, Legal, and Ethical Obligations
 - 13. Professional Growth

Articulations of teaching competence, like those in the TPEs, stem from coordinated efforts by state departments of education as well as professional societies concerned with teaching competency and the development of that competency. Organizations like the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, and the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards contribute to professional understanding of what constitutes competent teaching and how one develops and demonstrates that competence. Many such organizations endorse field activities as instrumental in a learning-to-teach system that unite policy, perspectives, and practices in the development of preliminary and professional

teaching competence. Conceptual frameworks and course structures that integrate field activities and promote understanding of the TPEs provide candidates opportunities to develop and demonstrate competence in teaching through observing classroom situations, participating in these classrooms, and systematically reflecting on those experiences.

For example, as one of the two field experiences and one of the eight required activities for National University's teacher education course in educational psychology, candidates write a case study of a classroom observation where instructional approaches are used to address diverse learners, noting how instruction was adapted to meet individual needs as well as noting the specific California K-12 content standards the observed lesson met. This field activity is linked to TPEs regarding the development of pedagogical skills (TPE 1), making content accessible (TPE 4), developmentally appropriate teaching (TPE 6), and early knowledge about instructional planning (TPE 9), among others. The early placement of the educational psychology course in the candidate curriculum demonstrates the importance that this program places on observation of an in-service teacher, rather than activities that focus on candidate participation in instruction. In addition, it simultaneously signals an emphasis on analysis of the in-service teacher's instruction and curriculum rather than an analysis of lessons designed and taught by the candidate.

An example from a course that occurs later in National University's teacher education program has candidates, based on data collected from students in their field-activity classroom, write learner outcomes and developmentally appropriate and instructionally engaging educational activities to meet those outcomes. Later in the same course, candidates are asked, in collaboration with the teacher in their field activity classroom, to co-plan and co-teach a lesson, obtain the field activity classroom teacher's feedback, and then write a reflection on the effectiveness of the lesson design and implementation. The complexity and structure of these latter field activities, like those in the earlier example from the course in educational psychology, are designed to help candidates meet teaching performance requirements. This field activity is linked to the development of specific pedagogical skills (TPE 1), assessment of student learning (TPE 2 and TPE 3), making content accessible, engaging, and developmentally appropriate (TPE 4, TPE 5, and TPE 6), and assisting candidates in understanding students and planning for instruction (TPE 8 and TPE 9). Also clear is that the activities in the latter example are more complex and focus more on reflection and inquiry into teaching within the same essential mode of delivery—that of field experiences.

As evidenced in the examples as well as through discussion of National University and professional teacher education societies and standards, the context for blending field experiences into teacher education course content is highly

influenced by institutional commitments as well as student learning preferences. Nevertheless, at the core, this blended learning context is supported by efforts of state education agencies and professional accreditation societies to systematically introduce meaningful experiences into learning-to-teach systems. How such activities relate to principles of blended learning, teacher knowledge, and teacher thinking, as well as thoughts on the complexity of online implementation, especially with regard to the offering of field experiences in online teacher education classes, is discussed in the following section.

Principles

Blended learning is an emerging field. Nonetheless, basic work on the identification of blended learning design features as well as articulation of specific strategies for building blended learning practices provide a useful basis for programmatic and instructional understanding. Those who have studied blended learning practices (Rossett, 2002) have established that blended learning is, at minimum, the use of more than one instructional methodology in an instructional context. Consequently, numerous combinations of instruction fall under the basic rubric of blended learning. For instance, the mixing of direct and group instruction, lecturing and coaching, self-paced instruction and simulations, and formal and informal instruction, as well as the blending of classroom instruction with online instruction and the blending of online instruction with, in the case of field activities, on-site instruction, all qualify as blended learning examples. At many institutions, the integration of blended learning practices has meant a progression from offering traditionally on-site classes with limited blended material, to the blending of online resources into on-site classes, and, finally, as with National University's teacher education program, the blending of on-site activities (field experiences) into online instruction. Given these blended learning possibilities, these are certainly unique and engaging times in teacher education.

Although most arguments in favor of blended learning resonate from the notion that multiple-method learners need blended models of instruction, best practices in any facet of education have always included those very notions through using a variety of delivery modes. As with other inquiries into instruction and learning, the examination of blended learning is informed by contributions from the fields of instructional design, curriculum and instruction, and learning psychology, among others. As indicated, National University's field experiences are requisite activities in the development of preservice teachers. Areas of particular interest include fields such as teacher knowledge and teacher thinking, which consists of knowledge of content, pedagogical content knowledge, and the knowledge of learners and learning. In addition, the field of instructional practices, which

comprises planning for instruction, implementing instruction, and the assessment of learning, is of particular interest and importance.

Finally, as with other instructional development, blended learning programs benefit from specific guidance in planning, delivery, management, and evaluation. Blended e-learning, like integrated field experiences in online environments, is informed by perspectives found in Khan's global e-learning framework (2003). Khan argues that the following perspectives or factors are critical to online teaching and learning: (1) pedagogical, (2) technological, (3) interface design, (4) evaluation, (5) management, (6) resource support, (7) ethical, and (7) institutional. Ultimately, especially in the context of a tuition-based institution like National University, principled development of blended learning includes considerations of how to identify and allocate resources to achieve strategic purposes. Although blended learning, with regard to the integration of field activities into online classes, is guided by key principles from the fields of teacher education and instructional design, it is also an institutional enterprise, and therefore it is informed and mediated by institutional concerns such as resource support and management. So Khan's framework is a useful mechanism for better understanding the potential impediments to successful implementation of blended learning practices.

Challenges

Although endorsed as an integral component of the curriculum of preservice teacher preparation (Darling-Hammond & Cobb, 1996), field experiences have also come to be recognized as complex processes that are dependent on the collaboration between universities and schools (Knowles & Cole, 1996). And when instruction takes place online as opposed to on-site, there are clear challenges to maintaining collaboration and coordination between field experiences and the pedagogical purposes they serve in the preservice curriculum.

National University, like more and more institutions of higher education today, relies on services of adjunct faculty to deliver much of its instruction. This is clearly the case in teacher education classes containing field experiences. The merit of these adjunct instructors is not at issue, as many have advanced degrees—especially in the case of teacher education—as well as extensive experience teaching within K-12 classrooms. In fact, these instructors introduce needed perspectives into the lives of preservice teacher education candidates. Adjunct instructors teaching in public education also provide important employment linkages as well as linkages to classrooms needed to carry out field experiences. At the same time, the fact that many of these relationships are informal and not coordinated through the university is clearly troubling for the effective management of blended learning resources.

In addition, although National University employs a full-time faculty member as a statewide field services coordinator as well as full-time coordinators at each of its nine learning centers, the sheer volume of field-related activities (two per course per candidate), across thousands of candidates and hundreds of on-line instructors, clearly challenges the effective management as well as the academic integrity of how blended field experiences are implemented. As with many other teacher education programs, the field experience coordinators are primarily occupied with student teaching placements occurring at the end of the teacher education program. Such a focus, however, further detracts from efforts to coordinate and manage integrated field experiences.

National University's initial curriculum planning for blended field activities for online classes includes a comprehensive effort to enlist and certify individual teachers in the hundreds of school districts where the university's teacher education candidates carry out field activities. But current practices have adjunct teaching faculty assist in the identification and assignment of field experience sites, thereby holding a pivotal, yet largely unmanaged, position in how blended learning components are implemented. Clearly, the social as well as managerial infrastructure of this blended learning application could benefit from further support and development.

National University's implementation of integrated field experiences in online teacher education classes contains competent curriculum design, ongoing institutional commitment, and best instructional practices. Nevertheless, management and resource allocation as well as the institutional infrastructure are equally vital components for successful blending of field experiences into online teacher education. And as designers of e-learning environments attempt to blend a widening range of experiences into instructional contexts, the effective management and allocation of resources become more important implementation components. Whether considering internship experiences in business and industry or field activities for language learning, counseling, teaching, or other human services, the instructional viability of such experiences, especially when delivered in an online environment, is increasingly dependent on academically sound instructional models. Of course, these instructional models should be well managed and institutionally recognized and supported.

Conclusion

Integrated field experiences in online teacher education may seem an academically necessary and easily implemented natural blending for the collaborative roles that public and higher education play in the preparation and certification of

teachers. What emerges from examination of National University's integrated field experiences in online teacher education is a set of complex circumstances that are interdependent. Such innovative field experiences require institutional commitments and instructional designs that support new forms of collaboration and extended notions of blended instruction. Providing well-prepared and effective teachers for its children is a challenge that every nation faces. The global expansion of e-learning resources provides both the opportunity and means to meet such challenges, but those applications of e-learning are clearly reliant on expanded forms of blended learning and new models of institutional support to accomplish those ends.

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