USING SIMULATIONS TO TRAIN TEACHER CANDIDATES

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Abstract

Simulation involves participating in a very real learning experience that closely resembles an actual setting. This presentation will delineate what we know and do not know about the use of simulations in teacher preparation programs. Based on a literature review, the advantages and disadvantages will be shared with the audience.

While simulated environments are not a replacement for field experiences, they do offer several advantages to perhaps better prepare preservice teachers and can be possibly be used to argument field experiences. Simulations have been found to have distinct advantages, such as increasing understanding; providing a format for skill building; and developing critical thinking and cultural skills (Clapper, 2010). Virtual classrooms can also offer an environment for experiencing various student characteristics and learning about teaching approaches not easily observable in real classrooms. Foley and McAllister (2015) reported that the complex diversity of the simulated environment in terms of racial, cultural, and language needs of virtual students was a useful context for candidates to become more aware of issues, to understand students’ unique characteristics, and to plan for differentiated strategies.

There are also limitations of simulations including that simulated environments usually only represent a small group of students and not a full classroom; the lessons learned and knowledge gained may not transfer to real world classroom; and the work in the simulated environment may not increase candidate’s confidence in actual classrooms.

The purpose of this session is to review how simulated learning experiences have been used to enhance or replace traditional field experiences in preservice teacher education programs and to discuss the benefits and limitations of these experiences. Participations will learn about classroom simulations, how they are currently used in teacher preparation programs, and the advantages and disadvantages of their usage. Based on the presentation, participants can make informed decisions about the use of classroom simulations in teacher preparation programs.

Keywords: Teacher preparation, technology.