

Alternative Licensure Curriculum from KansansCan Redesign Gemini Schools

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Introduction

The purpose of this reflection paper is to encourage Educational Preparation Providers (EPPs) to partner with KansansCan Redesign Gemini schools to evaluate EPP curriculum through personal interviews with alternative licensure teachers in KansansCan Redesign schools. Banks, Jackson, and Harper (2014) stated, “Teacher preparation needs to be grounded in an authentic partnership between P-12 schools and colleges of education, with inquiry into sustained individual and institutional learning framing cooperation, collaboration, and partnership commitment” (p. 10). Curriculum, implemented by the EPPs, should take into consideration the experiences of those for whom it is designed and tailor pedagogical instruction to better match current practices. This will not only impact program completers, but the K-12 students under their care. In an article written by Darling-Hammond (2016), the point is clear that practice should mirror research and policy. Her historical outline of policy, and its influence on teaching and teacher education, clearly articulates trends in educational research and policy and how it has influenced practice. The KansansCan initiative is a perfect example to this point. Its focus, primarily dedicated to relevant real-life experiences and how relationships between teachers and students impact social and emotional education (Reeves & LeMare, 2017), calls for a proper evaluation of current curricular instruction provided by EPPs and how it aligns, or misaligns, to new initiatives expanding throughout Kansas in redesign schools. Zhang and Zeller (2016) stated, “It would make sense for policy makers and education leaders from universities and communities to strengthen existing alternative licensure programs...” (p. 88). This proactive partnership should work to eliminate the divide between university instructional methodology and pedagogical practice as it manifests in P-12 environments (Banks, Jackson, & Harper, 2014, p. 13).

Banks (2015) stated, “Research has identified traditional teacher preparation programs at the forefront of the problem for failing to provide the type of transformative experiences critical to developing a cadre of teachers and administrators confidently and effectively prepared...” (p. 68). The KansansCan Redesign project challenges traditional pedagogical curriculum that providing institutions have utilized for decades. Brad Neuenswander, Kansas Department of Education Deputy Commissioner, stated, “The skills that we are trying to instill in our students are skills that many of us have not had to experience or learn in our own lives and careers” (personal communication, July 24, 2018). Konst and Scheinin (2018) concur, “The teacher is not an information provider but more like a guide ensuring that the group searches information, shares it, and examines it from viewpoints of several professions” (p. 3).

Considerations

How does the Kansas Can redesign impact pedagogical practice in K-12 schools? How should EPP curriculum be redesigned to better prepare alternative licensure teachers for teaching in participating schools? What are the gaps? What are the districts' needs? How will EPPs meet the needs of K-12 students impacted by program curriculum? How can the relationship between EPPs and local districts be strengthened as a result?

Impact

Alternative licensure teachers, teaching in Gemini redesign schools, do provide concrete data for curricular design. Qualitative data, collected through conversational interviews with alternative licensure teachers and their administrators in Gemini redesign schools, should be the foundation through which change begins. Conversational interviews allow for a more candid sharing of experiences (Kvale, 1996). It is through the day to day experiences of alternative licensure teachers that a clearer policy of curricular practices should be explored and potentially adopted by higher education institutions providing pedagogical curriculum. Merleau-Ponty (2002) stated that these experiences are unique to the individual and only understood by that individual, therefore, only exists for the person partaking in the experience. Through personal interviews with alternative licensure teachers, the impact of K-12 redesign on alternative licensure teacher preparation can be analyzed.

The evidence of success with curricular redesign is not yet attainable since it has not begun in this specific context. Do EPPs need to redesign curriculum to better prepare alternative licensure teachers for an ever-changing and evolving educational system in Kansas? Yes. Seven districts in the state began the redesign project. Twenty-one additional districts have on-boarded with another twenty joining soon. The impact on alternative licensure teachers will increase and should directly impact alternative licensure teacher preparation curriculum offered by EPPs. Brad Neuenswander continued, "Education is the only industry that waits for the government to tell them what to do. We are trying to break that culture" (personal communication, July 24, 2018). This reflection and analysis should prompt discussion and evaluation of the curricular shortcomings experienced by practicing alternative licensure teachers in K-12 Kansas redesign schools and promote a strengthening of K-12 and EPP partnerships through a more personal and candid sharing of experiences.

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