

# ON OR OFF: TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS

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## ABSTRACT

*As university business practices move toward international or global extensions, more and more colleges and universities are considering locating their teacher training programs in off-campus school-based locations. In this positional paper, the author examines the pedagogical effectiveness of off-campus school-based teacher education programs. Results suggest that off-campus school-based programs provide teacher candidates real life, real time opportunities to experience the everyday routine of a neighborhood school, community and students. Benefits include (1) Teacher candidates can benefit from the unofficial curriculum that can make learning meaningful; (2) Teacher candidates are able to experience multiple perspectives of a professional and working school; and (3) Mature teacher candidates are given the opportunity to enroll and complete the teacher training program given the flexibility of school based location and schedule. The author posits that off-campus teacher training programs might have more advantages for the teacher candidate than on-campus programs.*

## INTRODUCTION

According to Nakagawa, Asakawa, Yamada, Ushikubo, Yoshida, and Yamaguchi (2012), off-campus teacher training programs maximize flexibility to allow for a greater balance with life, family, work and other commitments. It allows programs to be more realistic and hence more desirable (Morton 1952). Off-campus collegiate instruction has expanded in recent decades, extending access to college and university education to non-traditional populations such as students who live a distance from the main campus, and others who find it difficult to enroll in courses at residential campuses (Alberta Education, 2017). To ensure quality, areas such as New York State (New York Department of Education, 2012) created standards to governing off-campus instruction. These standards assure that all off-campus instruction meets the quality standards required of all college credit-bearing instruction in the State. It ensures full integration of all instruction into a system of comprehensive, statewide planning for higher education.

The traditional way of higher education instruction has been on-campus programs where students travel to a university to attend classes. These teacher training programs, which are accredited one or two-year programs, typically consist of on-campus courses. Included are school placements, which a classroom teacher as well as a university supervisor mentors. Teacher candidates are required to make the connection between often-contradictory places with little or no direction on how to negotiate such multifaceted relationships (Mary, 2011).

This is where off-campus school-based teacher education programs differ from on-campus teacher education programs. Off-campus programs allow teacher candidates to begin their studies and complete their teaching degrees by taking classes at one of the off-campus sites located in a school. Similar to on-campus programs, off-campus school-based teacher preparation programs typically consist of similar courses including classroom placements. The difference is that with

off-campus school-based programs a teacher candidate receives their classes in a local school system, either public or private. By making this change to off-campus programs, the candidate benefits through the immersion into the school, and all of the cultural and policy aspects associated, instead of just being able to learn about the environment at the university.

There are many benefits to school-based teacher training programs. Three of these benefits appear to be:

- (1) A teacher candidates may benefit from the unofficial curriculum that can make learning meaningful.*
- (2) A teacher candidate is able to learn multiple perspectives of a professional and working school.*
- (3) A mature teacher candidate can receive the opportunity and understanding with enrolling and completing the teacher-training program at a school-based location.*

### **TEACHER CANDIDATES CAN BENEFIT FROM THE UNOFFICIAL CURRICULUM THAT CAN MAKE LEARNING MEANINGFUL.**

It is important to understand the school routine in order to create discipline and good behavior so that learning can take place (Lies, 2012). Unlike the school-based teacher training programs, the on-campus teacher training programs lack the opportunity to experience the daily opening exercises, period bells, recess breaks, fire alarms or shut down practices. They do not experience the inclusive nature of the makeup of the school nor are they part of the daily extracurricular activities that occur.

The off-campus school-based teacher candidate receives a real life minute-to-minute understanding of what occurs in a school as opposed to a theoretical basis that occurs in a university classroom. A teacher candidate is able to benefit from experiencing the consistent orderly schedule and become familiar with the school atmosphere by the time they complete the teacher-training program.

For off-campus school-based instruction, a school routine occurs five days a week. Instead of sitting in a university classroom all day without schoolchildren, off-campus school-based instruction allows the teacher candidate to experience day-to-day activities occurring in a school. Candidates witness concepts such as lock down drills, fire drills and student social and academic interactions. These observations may not be officially part of the university curriculum. However, often this unofficial curriculum can make learning meaningful. In this sense, on-campus learning programs may hinder teacher candidates in this opportunity to experience the everyday routine of a “real” school. To ensure this some have established off campus education policies to ensure that adult students are provided an environment to learn about their world through a comprehensive process of gaining practical experiences related to life skills, interest, talents and career opportunities (Banbury Personal Interest Projects 2012).

The off-campus school-based itinerary enriches the learning experience of what the expectations of a new teacher will be. Such issues as how to get to the school, the number of students in the school, the name of the principal, school hours, recess, school buses, parking, etc.,

become part of the off-campus school-based teacher candidate's world. This includes the candidate learning how to navigate within the school, the location of the staff lounge, lunchroom, and even the library and gym. Perhaps, similar to some teachers, they will even drive around to find the closest Starbucks coffee shop so they can grab a coffee before school starts. All these are part of an off-campus school-based itinerary that one engages with, enjoys and explores. A teacher candidate does not do this to get good marks from a professor. Rather, these actions are natural and intrinsic. It provides a sense of social and emotional readiness, which often is a sign of productive learning. A teacher candidate may feel more relaxed and less anxious knowing his or her placement is what is being studied and applied. This realization adds depth to a teacher-training curriculum. These important and necessary learning bits and pieces, which would be novel to a new teacher entering the profession from on-campus learning, are part of the off-campus school-based benefit. It gives students the opportunity to gain further knowledge alongside their peers, giving rise to a more constructivist approach to learning, which they can later utilize throughout their teaching career (Moran, Vozzo, Reid, Pietsch, & Hatton, 2013).

### **TEACHER CANDIDATES ARE ABLE TO LEARN MULTIPLE PERSPECTIVES OF A PROFESSIONAL AND WORKING SCHOOL.**

According to Kraglund-Gauthier, Young, and Kell (2014), when a person invests time, effort, and money into something, he or she will form an emotional attachment. This can occur even though the desired outcome is not yet visible. This phenomenon may explain why having teacher candidates traveling daily to the local school for off-campus school-based teacher training may create a better connection towards the profession. This connection is the result of an investment of time and energy. Doing the same ritual everyday becomes a habit. A habit is like an autopilot; one does not need to think consciously because the subconscious is assisting in the immersion into the profession.

Hansen and Feldhusen (2016) stated that off campus training program is an experiential method of learning that integrates a learner's classroom studies with recognized on-the-job work experiences. When a teacher candidate in an off-campus school-based program feels at ease to go into the local school and becomes familiar with the environment, he or she understand the school culture. They become more aware of professional ethics, school themes, cultural events, sport or music activities, etc. that are important to the development of the teacher. When the school is crowded with school buses or parents picking up their children after school, the teacher candidate is able to get multiple perspectives of a professional and working school. The teacher candidate whether it is passing by the schoolyard or hearing children laughing and/or arguing that these are real life situations. These are real schoolchildren, precious and special, needing good teaching, coaching, counseling, instructing, and modeling to mold them into well-rounded human beings. They are not just concepts in a textbook. The teacher candidate learns that these students need to be able to excel and to achieve to their potential regardless of race, religion, abilities, age and gender. The teacher candidate gains a real life meaning to these concepts through experiencing the school-based learning community. Students' needs are no longer a part of a textbook. They are real.

If it is together that we grow and together that we achieve (Sze & Cowden, 2009), it is important that off-campus school-based teacher-training program candidates are not being “housed” off-campus in a local school where there is no interaction. Teacher candidates do not simply switch from a university classroom to a school. To do so is warehousing. These programs must be part of the school environment. They need to participate in the day-to-day activities such as opening exercises, announcements, standing for the national anthem, prayers where applicable, and information given by the principal. Teacher candidates need to be part of the audience hearing these announcements, as if they were actual members of the school. All the professors’ lectures and course work need to stop during this time. It needs to be a real life environment that brings theory and practice together so that the teacher candidates can experience a true daily internship on the path to becoming a teacher.

### **TEACHER CANDIDATES ARE ABLE TO ENROLL AND COMPLETE THE TEACHER TRAINING SCHOOL-BASED PROGRAM DUE TO THE FLEXIBILITY PROVIDED**

“Seeing all in one glance” is the phenomenon of “outside of time” (Eden, 2014). When teacher candidates are experiencing the off-campus school-based teacher training, they are at the same time learning about the school... They are learning and experiencing at the same time. This provides a steady, sustainable framework for a teacher-training program to be successful. Off-campus school-based teacher candidates integrated in the local school no longer have to be in the dark in regards to daily school based activities. With off-campus school-based teacher training programs, teacher candidates experience actual situations concerning actual school students, teachers, caretakers, support staff, principal, etc. They are learning from being in the environment and not merely from a textbook. Being able to obtain this knowledge is to understand the real life of the school.

This is especially beneficial to the mature teacher candidate. In a competitive job market, many people are returning to take courses or to study for an advanced university degree hoping to get ahead, stay afloat or receive a promotion. Some have issues and conflicts at work, while others are considering leaving their jobs to seek a more satisfying career. There are also people who lost their jobs due to budget cuts and have decided to go back to school for a professional degree. Still others just saved enough money for the tuition and decided that it was time to come back to school. No matter the reason, these adults have been away from the school systems and the memory of their childhood or teenage years’ understanding of a schoolteacher may have faded and no longer be relevant. Most of these adults returning to the university may find the change in the school environment very different compared to ten or twenty years ago. Returning to a university can be daunting. Attracting working professionals are part of the design of many off-campus programs (Yorkville University, 2017). People from the workforce for years have been focusing their energy, efforts and skills in their trades. In addition, stay-at-home mothers or fathers have been focusing on taking care of their families and children. Being in the sandwich generation, many also have the obligation and responsibility to take care of their aging parents. They are used to real life environments. As such, the real life environment of the off-campus school-based teacher-training program may be a better fit than an on-campus one. Inserting a teacher-training program

outside of the university campus and establishing it inside a local school provides these mature students a sense of the on-the-job training they are used to having. The move away from a perceived “serious” higher education university-based teacher training program to a familiar school-based neighborhood they can identify with, creates cohesiveness and may eliminate the psychosocial anxiety an on-campus program may create. In looking through another lens, it also allows them to determine through experiencing, whether this is the career for them.

## CONCLUSION

As university business practices move toward international or global extensions, more and more colleges and universities are considering locating their teacher training programs in off-campus school-based locations. The pedagogical effectiveness of off-campus school-based teacher education programs warrants this move. Off-campus teacher training programs allow for the routine experience for future teachers to get a feel of what their careers will be like in the future. This is a major difference from the traditional on-campus training. Off-campus programs provide teacher candidates real life, real time opportunity to experience the everyday routine of a real school, real community and real students. It creates a sense of belonging to the profession. Off-campus school-based instruction further provides opportunity to adult learners, who have been in the workforce and decided to enter this profession, to experience whether this is a good change for them. It gives them an understanding of what current learning practices, compared to what it was in their day. This helps to bridge the gap from their high school graduation to current practices.

For this to work, school-based teacher-training program candidates should not be “housed” off-campus in a local school. They must actually be part of the school environment. They must experience the day-to-day routines, expectations and commitments of a real teacher. School-based teacher training programs need to be real life situations that bring theory and practice together so that the teacher candidates can experience a true internship on the path to becoming a teacher. Anything less is warehousing.

As a sound pedagogical and business practice, off-campus school-based teacher-training programs might have more advantages to on-campus programs. Of consideration in the decision to locate off-campus school-based teacher training programs needs to be its cultural impact on students and the community.

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