

Recruiting Diverse and Multilingual Teachers

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Summary: This article describes the online elementary education program that has been created to better address the teacher shortage in Idaho and recruit diverse and multilingual teachers.

Keywords: higher education online, teacher shortage in Idaho, distant-site internships

Even prior to the pandemic, there was a teacher shortage in Idaho. According to Richert (2017), historically hard-to-find teachers (i.e., math, science, and special education teachers) continue to be scarce and may impact the rural schools the hardest.

Lewis-Clark State College (LCSC) was originally Lewiston Normal School, created by the Idaho Legislature in 1893 to address the need for quality teachers. The school has maintained its focus on producing quality teachers ever since (LCSC, 2017). “LCSC’s teacher education program has been named one of the top in the country by the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ), a nonpartisan, not-for-profit research and policy organization” (LCSC, 2019, para 1).

In an effort to continue to provide access to high-quality baccalaureate degree programs in Teacher Education for diverse populations and for multilingual learners, LCSC decided to create a totally online elementary education program (OEEP) and target paraprofessionals as a “Grow Your Own” effort as recommended by Garcia (2020). LCSC made several marketing and recruitment efforts for the OEEP during spring and summer 2020 to recruit paraprofessionals, many of whom are diverse and/or multilinguals.

The benefits of the online elementary education program for paraprofessionals include

- online classes that allow paraprofessionals to continue working full-time;
- local internships that allow paraprofessionals to continue working part-time; and
- a program coordinator who also serves as advisor, point of contact, and advocate.

Allowing OEEP participants to complete their internships locally requires distant site placements. These placements require that a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) be

established between LCSC and the district in which the placement will be made. Ideally, distant site placements are finalized by the end of the previous semester in which they take place.

By April 2020, MOUs were established with six different districts in Idaho, Montana, and Washington to accommodate the six students needing distant site placements for their Internship II in fall 2020. LCSC requires a full year of Internship (two semesters: Internship I and II) for student teaching purposes. Internship I students follow the LCSC school calendar with a typical schedule of

- 20 hours per week dedicated to online LCSC methods courses, and
- 20 hours per week in their classroom placement.

Internship II students follow the district site school calendar and are expected to be in their classroom placement all day, every day for the semester.

The final enrollment for the first official semester of the OEEP in fall 2020 was 16 with six students placed at distant sites in three different states. The final enrollment in spring 2021 was 25 with three students placed at distant sites, with one additional MOU created in Oregon. The final enrollment in fall 2021 was 26 with five students placed at distant sites, with two more MOUs created. Out of these students, 54% were already working in schools (as paraprofessionals, substitutes, or tutors) and 15% reported being racially diverse. The final enrollment in the spring of 2022 was 32 with six students placed at distant sites, with two more MOUs created within Idaho. Out of these students, 36% were already working in schools and 9% reported being racially diverse.

While 15% and 9% of students who reported being racially diverse does not sound very high, it is important to compare that to the Lewiston area where LCSC is located. According to the most recent demographic reports, Lewiston

has a population that is 94% White, 3% two or more races, 2% Native American, and 1% Asian (World Population Review, 2022). Therefore, the OEEP has attracted more students reported as racially diverse than exists in the Lewiston area.

Required Courses

The OEEP program has 39 credits of General Education Core requirements and 62 credits of professional education courses. This includes two semesters of internship (Internship I and II) under the guidance of a faculty member, on-site teacher educator (OSTE), and on-site mentor (OSM) for distance site placements.

Transition to Online

In May 2019, the Teacher Education Program (TEP) faculty participated in Quality Matters (QM) training to help them design and deliver quality online learning opportunities (QM, n.d.). Unknowingly, this also helped prepare for the pandemic that hit in March 2020, when all classes were delivered online or via Zoom through the end of the spring semester.

The majority of the OEEP courses had been transitioned to online by the fall of 2020, except for *ED 426: Internship I*. ED 426 is a combination of methods courses (English language arts, fine arts, science, and social studies) and a school-site placement. Traditionally, TEP students attended the methods courses on-campus in the morning and attended their school-site in the afternoon for one week and then attended their school-site placements all-day for two weeks in a rotation for the different content areas covered in the methods courses.

Program Challenges

Transitioning ED 426 to online proved to be the most

challenging. The professors involved met as a team to determine how this course would be transitioned to online for the fall 2021 semester. The final enrollment that semester was eight students, five of whom were traditional/on-campus students, and three of whom were online/distant site students.

The team recorded class sessions on Zoom and uploaded the sessions into Canvas for online interns to watch and add to the discussion. The team decided on this hybrid online instructional approach in hopes of keeping connections between on-campus and online interns, and encouraging discussion across formats in an effort to create a professional learning community approach for all the interns.

Transitioning courses to online was not the only challenge the OEEP faced. The faculty needed to prepare to work with diverse and multilingual learners participating in the program. LCSC does have a Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) which provides professional development for faculty. The faculty must know and understand best practices for working with multilingual students at the college level. According to Robertson (n.d.) effective EL strategies include

- building relationships with students;
- increasing language proficiency and peer interactions;
- explicitly teaching vocabulary and language structures; and
- building on background knowledge to increase comprehension.

Increase writing proficiency

A CTL training session has been scheduled for the Fall 2022 semester to provide this information to faculty and to discuss ways to ensure that these strategies are integrated into faculty's online course work. The online strategies to accomplish this include using discussions, multimodal instruction, and timely feedback from instructors.

Another challenge for the online elementary education program was to find OSMs for the participants. Since LCSC faculty were not available to visit the OEEP participants who were placed at distant sites bi-weekly as they did the local interns, appropriate OSMs had to be identified. Often, the OSM would be an administrator from the school or district in the distant site. However, sometimes this is not possible, so an individual outside the district must be identified.

Creating a calendar/schedule for our online interns who were working part-time as paraprofessionals presented another challenge. Based on feedback from the interns, they needed a consistent 20 hours each week in their classroom placements, which did not correspond with the traditional/on-campus interns' schedules of 20-40 hours

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a week. The elementary coordinators for the online and face-to-face internships met and compared schedules, and revised the schedule multiple times throughout the 2021-2022 academic year to meet the needs of these interns.

Program Changes

In an effort to improve the online elementary education program, the program coordinators collected feedback from the online participants and responded to concerns as they arose. Some of their questions and comments included:

- “Where exactly should I post my discussion reply for [assignment] response to one of the in-class students?”
- “So, session 2 was recorded today on zoom and will be posted tonight at midnight correct? So, I get until tomorrow at midnight to do the assignments and reply to my peers?”
- “I think I’m having bad management skills. I go to my classroom starting at 8 every morning. I have a small window in between where I work on school work and then go pick up my son and get home and help him with his homework then it’s roughly about 4pm. So, I watch the zoom from the previous day? And then do my assignments and work that are due that night as well?”
- “I feel very rushed with everything due every night while we are in the certain units. I also have been feeling like I am getting surprised with assignments and other things for the class that I didn’t know were happening since I use the calendar on Canvas to see and turn in assignments. I am making everything work with the internship, my courses, and my full-time job but I feel like I keep having to play “catch up” because of assignments I didn’t know about.”

The majority of these questions and comments came from our multilingual and paraprofessional participants and had to do with the structure, organization, and instructor

communication in the ED 426 course. According to Bergey, Movit, Baird, and Faria (2018), personalizing instruction and providing additional scaffolding benefits multilingual learners. As such, organizational adjustments and suggestions for ED 426 that the team found beneficial for all students include the following:

- Professors should clearly communicate times they were available for extra help or resources with a turnaround of 24 hours for feedback.
- Before the first day of instruction in each methods section, instructors should clearly communicate homework and due dates, and ensure the instructional activities appear on the calendar in Canvas.
- Instructors should consistently revise the organization of modules in Canvas in an attempt to ensure consistency on where to find particular assignments and other pertinent information.

Moving Forward

Beginning fall 2022, ED 426 will be converted to an asynchronous format instead of the current hybrid format. Previously, there were not enough online students to warrant an online section separate from the face-to-face. However, there is now sufficient enrollment to warrant an online section that is fully asynchronous with single due dates each week, much like a traditional online course. Such a move will require further collaboration for the professors involved in teaching this course to maintain a professional learning community and help support diverse students’ needs. Additional faculty development should be provided through the CTL and other means to ensure the faculty can meet the needs of diverse and ELs in their classes. Due to increased enrollment, faculty will need training to help with advisement for the students in the program, which will help them to get to know the students and build relationships with them. Student feedback will also be used to improve the OEEP over time to ensure it is high-quality and meeting the needs of diverse and multilingual participants.

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