

# CLINICAL PRACTICE: CHALLENGES AND CELEBRATIONS

*Editorial: 2019 CSOTTE Conference Chair*

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What a rollercoaster year education has had since our conference in October 2019. Our conference theme was *Clinical Practice: Challenges and Celebrations*. Dr. Rebecca Burns from the University of South Florida was our keynote speaker. Her presentation addressed recognizing the challenges of preparing teachers in today's high-stakes accountability climate. Never in our wildest dreams could we have imagined what would lie ahead of us in our preparation of educators.

Early in 2020, we began to hear of the virus we now know as COVID-19. Empty shelves became commonplace in the stores where we shopped. All the lessons we taught our children about personal hygiene were now paramount in daily school routines. The month of March roared in like a lion. It was a pivotal month for all educators. Schools closed, and this new reality of virtual education began.

One of our first challenges was to determine how our teacher candidates would obtain their 70 days of clinical teaching. Fortunately, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) allowed Educator Preparation Programs (EPP) to reduce the required number of days and accepted virtual instruction in lieu of face-to-face instruction. Across the state, numerous clinical teachers continued to assist with online instruction in tandem with their cooperating teachers. Testing centers were closed. How were students to complete their certification exams? Again, the TEA made an exception and allowed students to apply for probationary certificates while waiting to sit for their certification exams. Naturally, this caused great angst among clinical teachers in anticipation of securing their first teaching job. However, our resilient pre-service teachers were able to make the best of a less than ideal situation and articulate their technological and virtual instructional skills when interviewing for a teaching position. Surely, normalcy would return soon.

Summer 2020 did not bring any hint of normalcy. EPPs were faced with new challenges. Historically, districts across the state all started within a common timeframe. This would not be the case for the fall 2020 academic year. Start dates varied across the state by as much as three to four weeks. Again, how would clinical teachers meet the required number of clinical teaching days? The Governor's State of Disaster Declaration would continue to provide relief for this challenge. A new challenge became a reality. Partner districts

were hesitant to provide a placement for our pre-service teachers. Would our students be a help or hindrance to the Local Education Agency (LEA)? Field Directors communicated the virtues of our technologically savvy pre-service teachers and the value they would add to the success of the PK-12 student academic achievement. Challenge averted. What else could possibly arise? All clinical teachers are required to have a minimum of three observations. How would clinical teachers be supervised in a virtual setting? Fortunately, the TEA recommended synchronous and asynchronous observations to the State Board of Educator Certification (SBEC). The SBEC approved the recommendation. Another challenge resolved.

The 2018 CSOTTE Conference theme was "Embracing Change." CSOTTE's past Chair, Dr. John Sargent, wrote, "If we are to continue to train the best teachers for our great state, we must embrace the changes and the challenges that come from them." Educators have often commented about the necessity of flexibility. If education is to survive the current and unknown circumstances before us, we must not waver in our resolve for excellence in teaching. This flexibility will be apparent when we gather for our first virtual CSOTTE conference in 2020. I am confident there will be numerous celebrations to share when we meet in person again for our CSOTTE 2021 conference.