Preface

Twenty-first century learning is a paradigm that is most often connoted with technology-integration instruction and online education. According to the most recent statistics on online learning, over six million students in higher education are enrolled in at least one course online (Allen & Seaman, 2011). Similarly, the number of online courses continues to grow at the K-12 level; a growth of about 47% was reported for K-12 online learning between 2005-2006 and 2007-2008 (Picciano, Seaman, Shea, & Swan, 2011). In addition to the expansion in enrollment, the general perception of online learning continues to improve among stakeholders across all levels of education. Given the ubiquitous presence of information technology, and the constant growth of enrollment in online courses, today’s teachers are expected to be able to leverage learning among all students (traditional and non-traditional) with the appropriate use of educational technology and in a variety of learning environments that are mainly digital and virtual. As a result, most teachers are required to participate in professional development opportunities that enhance effective pedagogies using Information and Communications Technology as well as best practices for developing and delivering online instruction.

The fundamental success of instructors in technology-integrated classrooms and in online courses requires a major investment in professional development. While different models of professional development are in place, the typical format thus far consists of one day, one-size-fits-all workshops with no follow-up activities. Additionally, these “generic” workshops are led mostly by experts or skilled individuals who are not working in the organization and the meetings taking place in the traditional face-to-face settings. However, given the scarcity of financial resources, faculty development occurring in online mode is gradually becoming an accepted approach among administrators and educators. Many online professional learning models are comprised of readings, and peer-to-peer discussions. Treacy, Kleiman, and Peterson (2002) list the benefits of professional development online as 1) increasing access to meet individual learning goals, 2) lending experience with the use of technology as a learner, 3) giving educators a chance to experience the power of technology while learning in a supportive environment, and 4) providing new opportunities for follow-up activities. Additionally, online professional development presents the opportunity for anytime and anywhere learning, the generation of communities of learners, and the opportunity for faculty to experience the online educational environment first hand as a student (Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, & Feldman, 2010). Also, this format of faculty development ensures cost saving and an increased access to professional learning opportunities for instructors while they direct their own development. Overall, recent findings suggest that online, self-paced, and just-in-time learning and mentoring have positive impact on faculty use of technology as well as faculty performance (Brill & Park, 2011).
Besides the benefits of online professional development, the steady growth of online workshops for instructors raises an urgent need for dialogue regarding the planning, design, development, and assessment of online professional development. Each of these processes, especially instructional design, is essential for the effective training of faculty in best practices in teaching and learning in online environments and to ensure the development and delivery of high quality online instruction. Therefore, *Virtual Mentoring for Teachers: Online Professional Development Practices* offers peer-reviewed essays and research reports contributed by an array of scholars and practitioners in the field of instructional technology and online education. The objective of this scholarship is to highlight research-based online professional development programs and best practices models that have been shown to enhance effective teaching and learning in a variety of environments. In addition, instructor experiences are discussed to raise awareness concerning challenges and successes in online teaching and learning. The text is organized around the following two primary themes: *Professional Development Models for Faculty in Online Environments* and *Understanding E-Learning and Best Practices in Teaching and Learning in Online Environments*.

The first theme: *Professional Development Models for Faculty in Online Environments*, highlights the need for instructor training in instructional design. According to Barczyk, Buckenmeyer, and Feldman (2010), instructors design courses based on how they were instructed as well as around their own lectures and therefore lack training in instructional design. This deficiency is especially present at the higher education level. As such, to ensure quality instruction, instructor training in instructional design and instructional design models is needed. Writing on this theme, Jennifer Banas and Angela Velez-Solic describe best approaches in designing effective training for online instructors that incorporate instructional design principles. Banas et al. also stress the need to center faculty training on two other important principles and practices; adult learning principles and best practices in online teaching. Next, Denice Hood and David Huang present a variety of online professional development (PD) models documented in the literature. Similarly, Sheri Anderson and Beth Oyarzun discuss a professional development program which is based on the concept of community of learners and modeled after the Analyze, Design, Development, Implement, and Evaluation (ADDIE) instructional design method.

Anderson and Oyarzun point out how such models of online professional development can be used to best serve and engage faculty from diverse backgrounds and disciplines while Nathaniel Ostashewski and Doug Reid offer a professional development model based on a networked learning framework approach. The unique feature of the Ostashewski-Reid model is that it is administered through social networking sites – using social media tools to deliver innovative and engaging learning opportunities. Given the current ubiquitous use of social networking and social media tools, one can see how such models can be easily adapted to in faculty training and mentoring. Subsequently, Ken Stevens reveals two approaches to professional development that can be used to support collaboration among instructors in virtual environments. Vassiliki Zygouris-Coe’s paper shares a model for training, supporting, and monitoring online educators on a large scale and specifically at the K-12 level. What is distinct about this model is the fact that virtual learning is expanding at a very fast pace in the K-12 setting and, as Zygouris-Coe points out, teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions are very necessary for promoting successful teaching and learning experiences in K-12 online environments. Linda Wood, Richard Speaker, Greg Levitt, and Steven Grubaugh demonstrate how a well-known social networking site, Second Life, was used to mentor and train faculty. While Wood provides perceptual evidence on faculty acceptance and adoption of virtual technology for the purposes of professional development, Speaker et al. discuss using Second Life in conjunction with traditional professional development workshops. This option is very appealing since it provides faculty the opportunity to engage socially and academically with each other both in a
face-to-face format as well as on a virtual campus. Ideally, faculty development goes beyond the familiar or well-known traditional space. Finally, Lesley Farmer details professional development processes and unique assessment designs that are applicable for teaching and learning in online environments.

Contributors to the second theme of *Understanding E-Learning and Best Practices for Teaching and Learning in Online Environments* generally look at factors that influence or detract from successful online professional development and best online teaching experiences. First, Carol Brown presents a knowledge base necessary for understanding online environments in general and describes the benefits, best practices and sources for quality online professional development. Next, Angela Velez-Solic and Jennifer Banas point out how factors such as differences in location, departmental and institutional budgets, and departmental and institutional leadership may cause difficulty in the development, implementation, and sustenance of online professional development programs and offer solutions for dealing with such differences. Kate Thornton, Brenda Service, and Louise Starkey then discuss the challenges of training faculty to deliver quality online courses and outline both theoretical and practical influences that inform successful online teaching. An important follow up issue, Lex McDonald and Allie McDonald examine the issue of motivation among e-learners and discuss how this challenge may be eliminated with professional development. McDonalds’ paper emphasizes the need for faculty training in online education. McDonald et al. also present theoretical approaches to understanding learning and motivation by way of instructional design. This is followed by Karen Skibba’s discussion on the pedagogical and philosophical transformations and challenges that arise when faculty prepare to train and are trained to teach online. Next, Kim Hyatt, Michaela A. Noakes, and Carrie Zinger discuss a variety of best practice strategies for engaging students in an online learning environment which instructors should investigate as part of their professional development to improve teaching and learning. Finally, Nicolas Lorgnier, Shawn O’Rourke, and Patricia Coward present a model that is applicable to the development of instructors and discuss how information developed from the use of online professional models could be used to facilitate the learning of communication skills that are essential and desirable for all students.

The hope is that each of the scholarly works presented under the two themes generated will help forward the agenda and discussion on the significance and the need for training and mentoring faculty online. Overall, this book provides very useful information for administrators and educators who are interested in the planning, design, and implementation of online professional development and virtual mentoring.

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**REFERENCES**


