

BOOK REVIEW

Virtual Mentoring for Teachers: Online Professional Development Practices

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*Virtual Mentoring for Teachers:
Online Professional Development Practices*
Jared Keengwe & Lydia Kyei-Blankson
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Mentoring and professional development are important aspects for the academic growth of faculty. The mentoring process is especially critical for emerging faculty in terms of creating a solid foundation for launching their academic career. In the virtual setting the role of mentoring reaches beyond gaining knowledge about classroom management, course content, and policies. The role of the virtual mentor is also one of a coach creating professional opportunities for collaborating with other experts and creating a sense of being connected to the institution. Working virtually can lead to a sense of isolation and the Keengwe and Kyei-Blankson book provides a compellation of chapters addressing many of the community building initiative needed for the success of both the student and faculty member.

“Virtual Mentoring for Teachers: Online Professional Development Practices” is a well-organized and structured volume which addressed timely topics related to online learning. These topics are of benefit to both the student as well as faculty members. As the popularity of online learning increases, college administrators and faculty need to address mentoring programs for emerging scholars. Additionally, the authors provide insightful chapters on working on promoting student success, professional development, personal branding, and motivating the online learner. By employing a variety of diverse perspectives on topics that encompass issues critical to today’s world of online learning, readers are provided with information needed for both faculty and student engagement.

The book is organized into a series of chapters that begin with a focus on instructor training and professional development. In a virtual world that can promote a sense of work in isolation, Chapter 1 Banas and Velez-Solic provide case examples illustrating ways to collaborate at a distance. As the authors of the chapter state, “The quality of the online learning experience

is only as good as an institution's instructors (p.19). Chapter 2 continues the emphasis of professional development with teaching assistants (TAs). Since many courses in both online and traditional settings are taught by part-time faculty and TAs, it is important to provide these instructors with much needed support. As Hood and Huang state, "The quality of undergraduate instruction by graduate teaching assistants (TAs) is a serious responsibility for which effective professional development opportunities have the potential to impact the educational outcomes of thousands of college and university courses nationwide." (p.38)

Chapters 3 and 4 emphasize the continued professional development of online faculty. In Chapter 3, Anderson and Oyarzun describe a multi-modal faculty professional development program designed using the Analyze, Design, Development, Implement, and Evaluation process (ADDIE) and the Community of Learners model. The author also provides detailed examples of the ways using this model can create a sense of collaboration and community among faculty members. In Chapter 4, Ostashewski and Reid propose utilizing the valuable resources of social networking tools to support faculty professional development programs. "...the scalability of networked learning, persistence of the resources and learning place over time, the ability to provide continuous enrollment, and the connections that this kind of learning program can provide make it a viable option to consider for any professional learning program." (Ostashewski and Reid, p.80)

Chapters 5-8 provide readers with additional support available for online faculty. Topics included in these chapters address virtual environment to support online collaboration by Stevens; online training by Coe; virtual mentoring and professional development by Speaker, Levitt, and Grubaugh; and utilizing Virtual World Technology for online professional development by Wood. While there are a number of online tools available to support professional development and training of faculty, the authors of Chapters 5-8 provide detail accounts on the ways these resources can be put into practice.

Assessment in the online environment is important to both the success of the student as well as the institution. In Chapter 9, Farmer outlines the principles of assessment and the general processes of assessment design, delivery, and analysis. Having an understanding of the history and definition of online professional development is discussed in Chapter 10 written by Brown and Neil. Having an understanding of the benefits and best practices of online professional development will assist both faculty members and administrators.

Chapter 11, by Velez-Solic presents additional information on the value of online professional development. Because of the wide range of online tools available institutions need to help faculty filter and use the information available to them. In Chapter 12, Thornton, Service, and Starkey discuss the transition between traditional on-ground teaching and online teaching. While an instructor may be effective in a traditional classroom setting, different skill sets are required to become an effective online teacher. The authors present best practices for preparing faculty to teach effectively in an online format.

While there has been a body of research published on E-Learning and motivating online students, Chapter 13 by McDonald and McDonald take a critical look at the *learning* aspect of E-learning. The authors address the impact of motivation on student success in the online format. Additionally, the authors reach beyond student success to address the impact of student motivation on the impact on various aspects of the institution. As stated by the authors, "These multiple perspective difference could have implications for engagement, planning, programming, and assessment." (p.254)

Many of the students that take online courses are adult learners. In Chapter 14, Skibba provides a qualitative study that investigates how faculty members teach to adult learners using online course delivery. The author found that, "The faculty members in this study made it clear that, while experience had been this most significant teacher when learning how to teach online, they wanted and needed more

help, even if they did not specifically ask for it,” (p.284). Results of the study can be used to improve and enhance curriculum and support services needed for adult learners to succeed in an online format.

Chapters 15 and 16 provide additional strategies for online instructions and marketing a personal brand. Strategies for online instruction, by Hyatt, Noakes, and Zinger offer online faculty a set of best practices to ensure faculty have the tools needed to succeed in online teaching. The authors provide several “Best practice strategies as a pivotal approach in their professional development to ensure online classroom activities remain relevant and engaging to their diverse community of learners,” (p.299). In Chapter 16, Lorgnier, O’Rourke, and Coward address the importance of controlling your

personal brand. With the vast amount of social networking tools available, it is imperative that online instructors promote an awareness of creating a professional brand for students. While the “cyber past” cannot be undone, the authors provide meaningful suggestions for ways students can learn to package their skills and showcase their distinctive attributes.

Overall, this text provides an in-depth analysis of the factors that impact successful mentoring and online professional development programs. The quality of both theoretical perspectives and practical applications is high. This is a well organized and written book that highlights an important aspect of online learning, professional development, and online mentoring. The book is a valuable tool for anyone in the area of online teaching and learning.

Carolyn Stevenson holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, Master of Arts degree in Communication, and a Doctor of Education degree with an emphasis in Educational Leadership and Organizational Change. She has over 18 years teaching and administrative experience in higher education, including 14 years experience in online education. Prior to pursuing a career in higher education, Carolyn worked in the publishing field and served as a technical writing consultant. She is currently a full-time faculty member for the Communication Department at Kaplan University. She has been working for the University since 2004 and has served in both administrative and faculty roles. She regularly presented at professional conferences and has written a number of articles, books, and book chapters on online education and qualitative research. She is currently working on co-editing a text entitled, Building Online Communities in Higher Education Institutions: Creating Collaborative Experience to be published in 2014.