Chapter 6

Doctoral Student Involvement in Online Course Development: Collaboration on an Introduction to Special Education Course

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ABSTRACT

As modes of course delivery evolve so do the demands for instructors with experience both online and in-person. Traditionally, advanced graduate students in special education gain experiences through “in-person,” co-teaching, or graduate/teaching assistant experiences. Further, if given the opportunity to teach online, the course is usually already developed with little or no opportunity to build additional online modules. In this chapter, the authors will describe a course during which an instructor and seven PhD students work as a collaborative learning community to develop an online version of an “in-person” introduction to special education course. A unique feature of the class was the online version needed to address a broad range of pre-service school personnel (e.g., pre-service: teachers, school counselors, school psychology students). Although the focus of this chapter is the development of an online introductory course, the strategies covered can be used to develop a wide range of online course topics.

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INTRODUCTION

In previous years the “typical” college student may have been easy to define, a student between 18-21 years old living on-site and attending a four-year institution full-time. This traditional image has changed over the years. With the increase in returning adult students (e.g., career changers, military personnel) and, taking into consideration family and financial demands, there had been more of a focus on adult learning outside of traditional “brick and mortar” programs. Advances in online technology has provided the accessibility and flexibility needed to allow students in higher education to reach their goals in a way that fits their lifestyle. In 2016, it was reported that the number of students taking online courses grew to 5.8 million nationally, which continued a massive 13-year trend (Online Learning Consortium, 2016). Given the vast migration to online learning, it comes as no surprise that by 2019 it is predicted that 50% of all classes will be online (Imod Education, 2016).

Despite the continued trend toward online learning, doctorate programs are typically centered around training and preparing students for in-person instruction (Bok, 2013). As the adoption of online learning expands, more and more students will continue to seek new ways to learn and gather knowledge. Therefore, as educators we must be willing to embrace the trend toward online delivery and consumption of information and course content.

The question becomes how do we as educators who were trained in the traditional “in-person” model, use online learning to create a world that opens up the doors of knowledge to a more diverse community. To begin, it is encouraged to imagine a world where online education is not only easily accessible, but easily digestible. While we are all at various points in our careers (e.g., teaching for 10+ years, just starting a new position at a university) and various experience levels with online teaching, there are still commonalities in how we answer this question. Take a moment to answer the following questions and reflect on the answers.

- When you decided to enter into the field of education, how did you envision your class being structured? Did you consider online teaching at that time?
- What goals did you set for yourself?
- What was your plan to captivate and expand the minds of your students? Do you have any concerns with translating this plan to online learning?
- How did or how will your goals evolve after the first year? How about in 5 years?

With the growth of online learning over the years and its current trajectory, the majority of higher education instructors may have the opportunity to teach and/or develop online coursework (Babson Survey Research Group, 2017). The effectiveness of our online course delivery lies in our hands. How have/are we embracing online learning? What is the ultimate goal? Keep these questions in mind while navigating through this chapter.

In this chapter, the process for creating an online course while also incorporating our passion for special education and how we set our sights on reaching our diverse community of learners is discussed. No matter what discipline one has chosen or have yet to choose, we hope that by sharing our experiences we can all continue furthering the advancement of high-quality online learning. This chapter is structured into two main sections: (1) exploring the development of our online course through four essential steps (Ascough, 2002) and use of the ADDIE model (Aldoobie, 2015) and; (2) utilizing the seven principles.
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