Chapter 11
Quality Assurance Within Synchronous Sessions of Online Instruction

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ABSTRACT

This chapter addresses strategies for using the operation mechanisms of a quality assurance framework to guide the design and implementation of synchronous sessions of online instruction within a teacher education program. Quality assurance provides a foundation for systematic diagnosis, decision making, and action that results in continuous improvement of online instruction. Open systems theory in quality assurance informs this chapter. Additionally, this chapter draws on an ecological approach to the understanding of interaction that takes place in quality assurance frameworks. The chapter is organized into three parts that together address key strategies toward fostering a community of learners in synchronous sessions of online instruction while addressing quality assurance: 1) the importance of quality assurance; 2) how an educator preparation program can be enhanced through synchronous learning and quality assurance; and finally, 3) how an educator preparation program can ensure that synchronous learning and quality assurance initiatives are effective.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions face pressure from stakeholders and accreditation agencies to demonstrate that a vigorous examination of data is used to track program quality. Yet, operational definitions of quality in higher education are elusive (Sallis, 2002), complicating the important task of clearly identifying what is meant by “quality” when addressing synchronous online instruction. There is a need to develop new and improved tools within disciplinary areas to aid in quality assurance efforts (Roksa, Arum, & Cook, 2016). As a result, quality assurance in higher education and in online coursework is of growing interest internationally (Ellis & Hogard, 2019; Jung, Wong, & Belawati, 2013) and within the United States (Shattuck, 2014).

This chapter focuses on strategies for using a quality assurance framework to inform synchronous online instruction in higher education institutions. Quality assurance initiatives should be responsive to the context in which instruction take place (Wang et al., 2013) rather than being applied in a one-size-fits-all manner. A plan that works in one higher education institution might not work as well in another. The chapter begins with an overview of how quality assurance can enhance synchronous online instruction. This chapter proceeds to describe a holistic approach to quality assurance. Quality assurance should be carefully designed, implemented, and evaluated, while remaining sensitive to the local needs of a program. Tools commonly applied in the business community that promote quality assurance, including Six Sigma and the quality cycle, are described in terms of how they can enable quality assurance for synchronous online instruction. Following a discussion of these tools, the chapter next stresses the critical nature of professional development. Live training sessions and online training modules are an essential aspect of quality assurance. This professional development, ideally, is project-based, with participants becoming problem solvers. Finally, limitations of quality assurance initiatives are considered. These limitations include time constraints and a possible lack of support among faculty for a quality assurance initiative.

QUALITY ASSURANCE AND SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE INSTRUCTION

Synchronous online instruction enables collaborative learning within makeshift virtual classrooms through live dialogue between faculty and students. A platform that enables web conferencing, video streaming, instantaneous sharing of documents, one-on-one dialogue, and real-time participation in group activities (Giebers et al., 2014; Koh & Lim, 2012) allows synchronous online instruction to become interactive (Jahn et al., 2012) and engaging (Dixson, 2010). In many classes, instructors blend
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