Chapter 1

Faculty Professional Development in Creating Significant Teaching and Learning Experiences Online

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ABSTRACT

Teaching in the online world means a new way of delivering content that may be abstract for some professors. When teaching online, you need to take into consideration the content of the course and the methods in which the students will assimilate knowledge. Understanding the history, arguments for and against online teaching, along with the basic theory of adult learning may help the professor understand the initial move to online teaching. After the initial understanding of online delivery, there is a continued need for professional development that is applicable for the online instructor.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching courses in the virtual environment is not only a new means of delivering course content to students but is an increasingly innovative way of facilitating information for the success of learning across age groups and geographic spaces. Incorporating new and changing pedagogical approaches, instructors must be continually supported in their quest to provide excellent teaching. For many instructors who are making the transition from the traditional classrooms in a face-to-face environment to that of the online environment, there can be misunderstandings, angst, and even confusion over what the most effective role an online instructor plays (Dolan, 2011). Similarly, determining what and how to implement those proven best practices for delivering instruction is essential for the success of the instructor and student.
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alike. Supporting these new or even veteran instructors may be challenging as the previously established methods of professional development support for the traditional classroom teachers may not be as effective.

More specifically, the move from classroom-based learning to that of online learning, which is typically multimedia based, has placed greater (and different) demands on instructors. Students in the online setting are seeking more of a learning partner in education and not simply facilitators of information. Instructors in the online setting are forced to move away from the daily face-to-face teaching model and into the online environment where a combination of asynchronous and synchronous learning environments are utilized. This change of emphasis in the instructional setting may prove difficult for some instructors who transition from the traditional teaching setting into the online environment (Ormrod, 2008). With the change from the daily face-to-face contact to the online environment, instructors are now working, for the most part, in settings where they are physically separated from their colleagues and could have an increased feeling of isolation. Professional development opportunities can support faculty to feel less isolated and disconnected from colleagues, build a community of learners, improve teaching, and increase organizational capacity (Alexiou-Ray, & Bentley, 2015).

However, professional development opportunities for online faculty often emphasize on topics related to technological training with little to no guidance on effective online pedagogical practices and their application in the online environment (Moskal, Thompson, & Futch, 2015). Taking into consideration the distinct needs of adult learners, faculty must apply research-based methodologies, innovative instructional technologies, and comprehensive assessment practices to strengthen their own craft and improve student learning outcomes. Vaill & Testori (2012) note that support for professional development pertaining to online education is critical to allow faculty the opportunity for pedagogical problem solving and discovery.

This chapter will explore the professional development topics online instructors may require in order to equip them and others who are interested in applying their skills to the online teaching and learning platform. This chapter is also intended to bring together the wide array of strategies to prepare instructors for teaching online courses or to advancing the skills of veteran online instructors. Providing a rich initial presentation of valuable and proven themes to reinforce faculty professional development, this chapter will explore the trends in the literature that support faculty’s growth and their success in practice within the online platform. With this type of instruction significantly increasing in popularity, more and more faculty are requiring initial and ongoing support for their own success and that of their students.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF ONLINE EDUCATION

In today’s world of learning, online education has become more popular than ever and has a somewhat brief history of its development within the scope of education in its entirety. Important to note that with this brief history, the pedagogy has not yet had ample time to catch up with the fast expansion of popularity and growth (Zawacki-Richter & Latchem, 2017). Learning and teaching in the online platform, conducted in the convenience of one’s home, has proven to be increasingly attractive to both students and instructors (Ching, Hsu, & Baldwin, 2018; Kincey, Farmer, Wilsher, McKenzie & Mbiza, 2019). The premise of quality teaching is at the heart of this profession no matter the environment, however this takes ongoing professional development for online instructors in the application of best practices, training, and support (Adnan, 2018; Barlett, 2018; Ching, Hsu, & Baldwin, 2018; Roberts, 2018).
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