

Chapter XVI

Videoconferencing: An Alternative to Traditional Professional Development in the K–12 Setting

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces ways in which videoconferencing can be used to support professional development which is being provided to educators. It looks at the ways in which adults learn, the need for quality professional development in education, and the different types of professional development which are being provided. It then goes on to discuss ways in which videoconferencing can be used to make the transfer of knowledge more effective. After reading this chapter, educators will be able to identify ways in which they can utilize videoconferencing to make professional development more beneficial and cost-efficient. It also shows educators how they can break away from ineffective traditional modes of providing in-service training and move toward more high-quality, comprehensive, and embedded professional development, which addresses the individual needs of teachers and buildings.

INTRODUCTION

As professional development continues to transmit practices to educators working in the field, it is necessary to consider what the most effective methods and modes are for assisting in the transfer of new skills, abilities, and knowledge. When planning a professional development session, many variables need to be considered including: who is the audience for the professional development; what is the audience’s preferred method of learning; and what is the most effective way to teach this topic so that people will learn the information. A more current area of interest to those providing assistance in improving the transfer of knowledge into practice is the role that technology can play as a support to professional development. More specifically, what role can videoconferencing play in supporting professional development for teachers and administrators who are in the field?

Adult Learners

Professional development is generally provided to adults who are working in real-time settings. When planning a professional development session one must, therefore, consider how adults learn. Adult learning theory indicates that characteristics of

adult learners that need to be considered include autonomy, self-directed, goal-oriented, relevancy-oriented, and practical (Speck, 1996). Adults also have accumulated life experiences and knowledge that need to be acknowledged and respected during the learning experiences so that they do not fear being criticized (Speck, 1996).

Merriam (2001) discussed the concepts of andragogy and self-directed learning as two ways to define adult learning as a unique field of practice. Merriam noted that, in addition to bringing the concept of andragogy to light in 1968, Malcolm Knowles developed five assumptions underlying the concept. These assumptions were that an adult learner: is someone who has an independent self-concept and who can direct his or her own learning; has accumulated a wealth of life experience that is a rich resource for learning; has learning needs closely related to changing social roles; is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge; and is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors (Merriam, 2001). These are very similar and somewhat overlapping to what Speck identified as adult learning characteristics.

Tweedell (2000) pointed out that adults require learning programs which are specific to their learning style, and that adults learn best when

Table 1. Adult learning characteristics (Adapted from Speck, 1996)

Autonomous
Self-directed
Goal-oriented
Relevancy-oriented
Practical

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