

Chapter XIV

Supervising Projects and Dissertations

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ABSTRACT

Supervising projects and dissertations within Career Technical Education requires a complimentary medley of skills, strategies and technologies appropriate for the intended learning outcomes. As the communication mechanism has evolved – the task has changed. The interpersonal dynamics of supervision conducted through electronic means is more complex and intricate. Technology presents challenges on behalf of both faculty and students engaged in a project or dissertation. Difficulties for faculty include the time technology takes to use, and adapting class materials that do not count towards promotion or tenure. Student concerns include not having the right technological equipment and being isolated. Faculty supervising projects and dissertations are using more innovative strategies such as online resources and working with students in groups.

INTRODUCTION

For many it seems writing is something that we ‘just do’, hoping it will turn out well. . . for writing, like carpentry, gymnastics and drawing, is

only partially talent-determined. Like the other three, writing is also a skill and a craft. It can be learned and practiced, honed and sharpened, practiced some more and perhaps even nearly perfected. (DeLyser, 2003, p. 170)

Graduate level projects and particularly, dissertations involve a great deal of writing and rewriting. “Two steps forward” and “one step back” are the steps of the dance that becomes familiar to the writer of a thesis or dissertation. Writing about one’s research is, perhaps, the most frustrating of processes because writing about topics we are still struggling to understand do not usually spring forth in clearly organized sections and paragraphs. So we find, “many graduate students face theses and dissertations under-prepared for such writing tasks,” (DeLyser, 2003, p. 179); and supervising their work can be challenging. There is great variability of talent and writing experience across programs and among students in the same programs.

It is clearly evident that graduate education has experienced changes with the advent of computer software and internet offered programming. Online education has grown immensely over the past ten years. It is no longer a matter should technology should be used in educational programming, but rather how should it be used. The conversation has focused on what is the best way to deliver an educational course or program (Li & Irby, 2008). There is an increasing number of doctoral programs offered online by traditional, nontraditional and for-profit institutions (Adams & DeFleur, 2005). At times, classes and meetings are held face-to-face; others manage the entire process at a distance.

However, the use of these technologies interacts with but does not substantially change the process or the final product for the student. For some, e-learning applications compound their difficulties, while others find great solace with the advent of such tools. Regardless of the method of education, however, the supervisory tasks remain largely the same. Whether the student is using a quill pen, a typewriter or the latest version of computer based word processing and submitting their product in person, via mail or electronically, it is still the role of the supervisor to review, and provide constructive criticism while inspiring

students to refine their ideas and increasing their skill and knowledge base.

In this chapter, a critical reflective analysis regarding the supervision of projects and dissertations concerning e-learning applications for career, and technical education is presented. Objectives of the chapter include two key elements: Projects and dissertations within CTE utilize knowledge/skills/abilities to demonstrate subject matter expertise and supervising these capstone experiences requires a complimentary selection of technologies and products appropriate for the intended learning outcomes (Grant & Graham, 1999).

BACKGROUND

Faculty, who serve as the supervisor of project, thesis or dissertation play a complex role in the process. They need to assist and encourage the student to demonstrate their subject matter expertise in such a way that the topic under study is understood by all while making a contribution to the field. Students, like most people use the Internet as part of the way they live. Thus, the advent of technology has created a new frontier for scholars and academics. Within this environment, the task of supervising projects and dissertations is carried out.

The role of the supervisor is multifaceted. Their task, function and how they structure the process and scope of student work are all critical components of creating a thesis or dissertation. The inlay of e-learning adds an interesting perspective. The result is the establishment of the e-supervisor, a relatively new concept in higher education.

The Supervisor’s Role

Career and technical education (CTE) has been a part of the educational landscape in America since 1917 when the first federal vocational education

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