Chapter 25
Meeting the Demand for Online Education:
A Study of a State-Run Program Designed to Train Virtual K-12 Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Although K-12 online education is becoming more common in the United States, the research base is still lagging behind. The field's understanding of how K-12 online teachers are being prepared is especially sparse. Given that few teacher education programs include online pedagogy in their teacher training efforts, it becomes incumbent on states to find alternative ways to prepare teachers for virtual instruction. This chapter analyzes a 9-week orientation session that is part of an established, state-run induction program for prospective K-12 online instructors. Although the findings are specific to the program being studied, the authors believe they can serve as a model for educators in other states wishing to develop similar types of induction programs and for teacher education programs that will eventually have to incorporate online pedagogy into their existing programs in order to meet the rising demand for K-12 online instruction in the United States.

INTRODUCTION

Based on predictions by leading scholars in the field, it is estimated that over five million K-12 students in the United States will be taking online courses by 2016 and as many as half of all secondary students will be taking online classes by 2020 (Christensen, Horn, & Johnson, 2008; Picciano, Seamen, Shea, & Swan, 2012). Although these statistics are based on current trends and are subject to change, it is safe to say, regardless of the actual numbers, that online learning is quickly becoming the new face of

American K-12 education. Currently, almost every state has developed some form of virtual public high school, and increasingly, individual school districts are developing their own online curricula for students. Other outlets for K-12 online education include consortium or regionally-based virtual schools, as well as public, private, and charter virtual high schools (Cavanaugh, Barbour, & Clark, 2009; Rice, 2006; Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2011).

Given the demand for online education, both in terms of the flexibility that it affords students and the potential monetary savings for school districts, it is likely that we have only begun to see the impact of online instruction on American public education (Journell, 2012). Perhaps serving as a harbinger of things to come, a handful of states have even begun mandating that all K-12 students take at least one online course prior to graduation as a way of preparing them for life in the 21st century economy (Journell, 2013; Kennedy & Archambault, 2012). For traditionalists, such change is troubling, but for those who see the potential in technology to revolutionize the way we view teaching and learning, online instruction offers immeasurable possibilities. Regardless of how one feels, however, the reality is that the era of online K-12 education is upon us.

Often lost in the discussion of online K-12 education, however, is the preparation of the teachers who will be delivering this instruction. Recent research suggests that few online K-12 teachers have received any formal training in online instruction. In a study of over 500 online K-12 teachers in the United States, for example, Archambault and Crippen (2009) found that less than one percent had received degrees in online or distance education. In order for online K-12 education to be sustainable, states must develop procedures to ensure the training of online faculty.

This chapter describes the efforts of one state to prepare instructors for their state virtual high school. Specifically, we analyze the possibilities and limitations afforded by a 9-week orientation to online instruction, which serves as the first part of the state's induction program for future virtual high school instructors. Little is known about state efforts to train K-12 teachers for online instruction, and by analyzing an established induction program, we hope to further existing knowledge about the training and professional development of K-12 online teachers.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Currently, most states and districts allow licensed K-12 classroom teachers to teach online based on the belief that teachers who are well versed in content and pedagogy can easily adapt their classroom instruction to an online environment. Research on K-12 virtual instruction, however, suggests otherwise (e.g., Journell, 2008; Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2009). Although many of the elements of effective teaching are the same online as in face-to-face classrooms, online instruction requires certain skills and dispositions that are unique to the online environment (e.g., DiPietro, Ferdig, Black, & Preston, 2008; Ferdig, Cavanaugh, DiPietro, Black, & Dawson, 2009; Journell, 2013; Quinlan, 2011).

Many professional educational organizations have developed standards that outline these specific skills and dispositions. The National Education Association (2006), for example, asserts that "all new educators should be equipped to instruct online" (p. 26) and offers recommendations for effective online instruction. Other professional organizations, such as the International Society for Technology in Education (2008), the Southern Regional Education Board (2006), and the International Association for K-12 Online Learning (2008), have offered similar recommendations (to see examples of these

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