Chapter 70
Incorporating Innovative Instructional Strategies to Enhance Learner Engagement in Online College Courses

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ABSTRACT

The effectiveness of innovative college teaching in online learning can be measured by learner engagement. Online learners in a master's degree program in education have expressed and shown an increase in learner engagement through the facilitation of innovative practices in addition to a synchronized weekly Skype session to apply innovative practices. These practices have proven to increase learner engagement and decrease completion time for doctoral study candidates. The two online programs will describe how the inclusion of innovation in online instructional strategies increases learner engagement. Solutions and recommendations for effective instructional strategies will also be reviewed in relation to facilitating learner engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Current research in the field of creativity and innovation in higher education courses emphasizes the belief that creativity is a skill that can be developed (Tierney & Lanford, 2016; Zhang, 2018; McGuigan & Kern, 2016; Ma, Yang, Wang, & Zang, 2018; Sykes, 2012; Duhamel, 2016; Pink, 2006). Teaching critical and

creative thinking is important as it is now a necessary skill for employment opportunities. Students are better prepared for careers in STEM fields when a culture of innovation on the college campus is created (Dow, 2014). Innovative practices in the area of creativity include specific instructional strategies such as: case-based instruction and simulation (Liaw et al., 2015; Terzioğlu et al., 2016); collaborative learning (Sykes, 2012); active learning (Brown, Kirkpatrick, Greer, Matthias, & Swanson, 2009; Liang & Li, 2018; McGuigan & Kern, 2016); and creative problem solving (Duhamel, 2016; Marquis & Henderson, 2015). Incorporating instructional strategies such as these encourage greater engagement and develop a sense of community amongst learners.

The focus of the chapter will emphasize innovative instructional strategies. Innovative instructional strategies must be aligned with learner engagement within higher education to produce successful graduates. The chapter will include a description of two original innovation practices for online graduate education programs. One such practice includes innovative instructional strategies within master's level graduate courses in higher education and adult learning, which fosters learner engagement. The second example includes a synchronous weekly Skype session to further engage doctoral study candidates, as well as faculty, towards engagement and a smoother, faster dissertation completion process. The chapter will conclude with a summary of innovative instructional strategies which further learner engagement. The need for additional research investigating innovative instructional strategies will be discussed as well as an encouragement to college professors to incorporate innovative instructional strategies which foster learner engagement.

BACKGROUND

The background of the chapter will discuss innovation in higher education. Definition of terms and innovative practices will briefly be described. The three subsections include innovation in higher education as a skill area; creative instructional strategies in higher education; and learner engagement in online learning in higher education. This will be followed by instructional strategies which will nurture greater student engagement.

Definition of Creativity and Innovative Practices in Higher Education

Both creativity and innovation will be defined within the context of higher education and college student learning. Tierney and Lanford (2016) referred to creativity as, "inventiveness grounded in field-specific knowledge" (p. 16). Jahnke, Haertel, and Wildt (2017) further discussed the term creativity in the context of higher education and found only small aspects of creativity were included in their definitions. Adriansen (2010) drew a connection between critical thinking and creative thinking with critical thinking being a crucial element for attributing creativity amongst college students. Raiker (2010) emphasized reflective thinking as a significant portion of creativity in learning practices. Brodin and Frick (2011) endorsed that critical and creative thinking are interrelated parts required for scholarly learning.

Overall, creativity and innovation are used interchangeably, as skills acquisitions necessary for the 21st century career skills (Tierney & Lanford, 2016). Whereas, Tierney and Lanford (2016) claimed innovation as a nebulous term within the context of academe since there are varying definitions across disciplines. Godin (2014) argued innovation should be defined as a concept which allows fluidity of meaning over time. Ultimately, Tierney and Lanford (2016) defined innovation as, "the implementa-

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