

Chapter 14

An Online Professional Learning Series: Preparing P–12 Educators to Teach in Online SEL Environments

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes an online professional learning series (OPLS) focused on supporting educators in designing P-12 online social-emotional learning (o-SEL) environments. The authors argue there is a need for o-SEL professional learning, which can serve as an ongoing, flexible resource educators can reference as they design their online learning environments (i.e., online classrooms). To participate fully in this OPLS, P-12 educators are situated to participate in professional exercises, guided by design thinking, to identify problems and possible solutions specifically related to their individual online learning environments. Through this process, educators draw upon the content, resources, and online teaching strategies to brainstorm practical solutions to better serve their learners' needs in online learning environments. To earn credit for completing the professional learning modules, educators submit solutions for peer review and professional evaluation. Upon receipt of the feedback, they may revise and resubmit, if needed, to demonstrate their new skills and competencies.

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INTRODUCTION

Schools around the world have increased access to hybrid, blended, and online methods for delivering instruction to P-12 learners. According to 2017-2018 data, 21 percent of public schools offered online courses (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2022b). During the global pandemic due to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19), 77 percent of public schools indicated use of and access to online distance learning for delivering instruction (NCES, 2022b). According to NCES (2022a), as of June 2022, “33 percent of public schools offered full-time remote instruction to any students” and “10 percent of public schools offered hybrid instruction to any students” (NCES, 2022a, para. 14). Based on this sudden shift, teachers are examining their practice and considering different methods to design engaging lessons via online instruction (Ahmmed et al., 2022).

Schools throughout the United States aim to create learning environments that nurture not only the academic needs of students, but also the students’ social-emotional and career and college readiness needs. To expand educators’ knowledge related to pedagogical strategies that meet the academic and social-emotional learning (SEL) needs of all learners, educators may attend and participate in additional professional learning and development (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Increasingly, online professional learning opportunities are being offered and accessed to support educators, leaders, and classroom support specialists, as they are flexible and can offer educators with a professional network and community, access to educator participant data, and agency (Hanover Research, 2019).

Central to this project is the notion that students and families continue to choose to learn in online, virtual, or hybrid schools and educational environments (Gross, 2021). To support teachers and families, schools and departments of education should ensure teachers, educational leaders, and student support specialists are supported and provided training to deliver effective online instruction (Geesa et al., 2022; Stein, 2022). For this reason, there is a need to further develop educators’ knowledge and pedagogical practices to foster SEL in online learning environments (Kamei & Harriot, 2021). This chapter describes the pedagogical strategies, online resources, and methods for fostering SEL in online learning environments.

BACKGROUND

In response to the increased access and rising need for online, remote, and hybrid learning environments, we, as professors in the field of education, designed an online professional learning series (OPLS) for teaching in online learning environments with support from our university. The first OPLS offered resources to pre-service and in-service educators to quickly gain new or additional skills in online teaching and learning for P-12 learners during the 2020-2021 academic year.

The OPLS consists of modules focused on areas educators reported as most challenging during the March 2020 to May 2020 timeframe when most schools were closed to in-person instruction due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The challenges included in the modules were identified via observation of and/or conversations with teachers, administrators, and teacher candidates at our mid-sized Midwestern university. In addition to an overview of best practices in teaching online, three broad topics and areas of need in teaching online to P-12 students were identified based on educator feedback. These areas included online social-emotional learning (o-SEL); online science, technology, engineering, and mathematics education (o-STEM) education; and literacy teaching in online learning environments. The initial goal was to as-

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