Chapter 7

Challenges of Online Teacher Professional Development Communities
A Statewide Case Study in the United States

Vassiliki I. Zygouris-Coe
University of Central Florida, USA

Bonnie Swan
University of Central Florida, USA

ABSTRACT

With so many educators needing either initial preparation or ongoing professional development to build and sustain expertise in their discipline, online professional development arises as a viable, effective, and timely vehicle for teacher training. Online learning technologies have the potential to transform the professional development of teachers; penetrate cultural, discipline, and other barriers; bring educators together to learn, share successes and challenges; and co-construct and transfer learning. This chapter presents examples of success and challenges associated with a large-scale U.S. statewide online teacher professional development community. It also makes the case for implementing a systematic approach to investigating the effectiveness of online teacher professional development communities through ongoing assessment and responsive evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to "tell the tale" (i.e., mission, scope, successes, and challenges) of Florida Online Reading Professional Development (FOR-PD), a large-scale U.S. statewide online professional development project, and its impact on preK-12 teachers' knowledge about reading research and effective instruction. The authors are the project's principal investigator, an associate professor of reading education at the University of Central Florida (UCF), and the project's lead evaluator, an evaluation specialist with extensive experience in learning assessment and planning and implementing evaluations in various educational agencies at

a variety of levels. This chapter examines the following: (a) the role of professional development on teacher quality; (b) the role of professional learning communities for supporting teacher capacity and expertise through professional development; (c) online professional development as a means of creating and sustaining teacher professional learning communities; (d) successes and challenges associated with a situated large-scale online teacher professional development community; and (e) trends and directions for the future.

BACKGROUND: TEACHER QUALITY AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Teacher quality has been the focus of much policy analysis as a result of research on the role of teachers on student learning. The No Child Left Behind U.S. Public Act (NCLB) requires a highly qualified teacher in every classroom (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003). The NCLB principles for high-quality professional development are comprehensive, multi-faceted, complex, and require extensive participation from administrators and teachers. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) indicates that effective teacher professional development is more than just coursework designed to fulfill a state or district requirement. It is a set of activities grounded in scientifically based research and producing a measurable effect on student academic achievement.

Professional development is most effective when it is part of a system-wide plan to improve and integrate teacher quality at all stages: preparation, induction, support, and ongoing development (USDOE, 2002). According to a congressional report by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (1997):

What teachers know and understand about content and students shapes how judiciously they select from texts and other materials and how effectively

they present material in class. Their skill in assessing their students' progress also depends upon how deeply they understand learning, and how well they can interpret students' discussions and written work. No other intervention can make the difference that a knowledgeable, skillful teacher can make in the learning process. (p. 8)

Professional development refers to those intentional, systematic, and ongoing processes and activities designed to enhance the professional knowledge, skills, and attitudes of educators so that they might improve the learning of students (Guskey, 2000). Professional development is an essential part of building teacher expertise in schools.

DuFour and Eaker (1998) recommend that the content of professional development programs should "be based on research," and used to "expand the repertoire of teachers to meet the needs of students who learn in diverse ways" (p. 276). They also recommend that the process of professional development should provide ongoing coaching that is critical to the mastery of new skills, attend to the tenets of good teaching, promote reflection and dialogue, be sustainable over time, and be evaluated at multiple levels with evidence of improved performance.

The NCLB principles for effective professional development require practices grounded in research, collaborative and strategic work, alignment with state standards, ongoing assessment, and developing a system for intervention and support to teachers and students. Although educational reform is warranted, and even mandated, change in educators' belief systems about pedagogy and learning does not occur quickly. Ongoing professional development is necessary for improving teachers' growth and instructional practice. Traditional face-to-face professional development has not resolved major educational challenges in the U.S. Many researchers (e.g., Dede, Breit, Ketelhut, McCloskey, & Whitehouse, 2005) propose that online teacher professional de-

18 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/challenges-online-teacher-professional-development/36937

Related Content

Behaviour Analysis for Web-Mediated Active Learning
Claus Pahl (2006). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 45-55).*
www.irma-international.org/article/behaviour-analysis-web-mediated-active/2969

Innovation of the Teaching Mode of History Courses in Colleges and Universities Based on Digital Technology
Dianfeng Liand Hongchang Jing (2023). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 1-12).*
www.irma-international.org/article/innovation-of-the-teaching-mode-of-history-courses-in-colleges-and-universities-based-on-digital-technology/320246

Is Pair Programming More Effective than Solo Programming for Secondary Education Novice Programmers?: A Case Study
Stamatios Papadakis (2018). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 1-16).*
www.irma-international.org/article/is-pair-programming-more-effective-than-solo-programming-for-secondary-education-novice-programmers/192081

The Effectiveness of Scaffolding in a Web-Based, Adaptive Learning System
Mei-Yu Chang, Wernhuar Tarngand Fu-Yu Shin (2010). *Web-Based Education: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools and Applications (pp. 459-473).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/effectiveness-scaffolding-web-based-adaptive/41358

A Cross-Country Comparison of Virtual Discussion Board Use in United States and Costa Rican Education Settings
Kari Hodge, Terrill F. Saxonand Jason Trumble (2013). *International Journal of Web-Based Learning and Teaching Technologies (pp. 77-105).*
www.irma-international.org/article/a-cross-country-comparison-of-virtual-discussion-board-use-in-united-states-and-costa-rican-education-settings/96899