Chapter VII

Professional Development Recommendations for Online Course Designers

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Abstract

The Internet is redesigning the delivery of instruction, and, consequently, time, space and distance are no longer constraints to teachers and students. Harrison and Berge (2000) state that "Internet access is becoming more widespread and its capabilities for delivering multimedia lessons are improving daily; the Internet is becoming the vehicle of choice for distributing learning across distances" (p. 57). However, teaching online

is a relatively new concept and effective professional development is needed to help educators learn to organize content for online delivery, convert instructional materials to online formats, use advanced multimedia tools, and integrate technology resources in online learning environments. This chapter addresses standards for technology-supported instruction and staff development; models of effective face-to-face professional development, along with adaptations for online educators; and professional development programs currently available to online educators. Recommendations for effective professional development have also been provided.

Vignette: Case Study of the Louisiana Virtual High School Project

During the 2000-2001 school year, the Louisiana Center for Educational Technology (a division of the Louisiana Department of Education) developed the Louisiana Virtual High School because some rural high schools in Louisiana were not able to offer certain advanced courses due to a lack of qualified teachers. In the first year, 11 Louisiana high school teachers were selected to teach online. All were certified in their content areas and had five to 10 years of teaching experience in their respective fields. All of the teachers received a $6,000 stipend to design and teach one online course for a year, and each had one hour of unencumbered time during the day to devote to the course. Every teacher had taken a distance education course, and they attended a two-day seminar on how to adapt their course materials to an online format. Once the school year began, however, the teachers had little instructional or technical support as they organized their content, adjusted the curriculum, changed their teaching practices, and struggled with technical problems. At the end of the first year, teachers recommended that for the program to be successful, they and their students needed on-going instructional and technical support.

Despite some attempts to provide professional development training, in the first year of the Louisiana Virtual High School Project, teachers were on their own. As a result, each instructor implemented his/her own version of an online course. Unfortunately, this seems to be a common occurrence. Authors of *The Power of the Internet: Moving from Promise to Practice* (Web-Based

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