

Chapter 12

Definition and History of Online Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

There exists a consensus on the importance of teacher professional development. This chapter provides a knowledge base for environments, describes the benefits, best practices, and sources for quality online professional development. The attributes associated with online professional development can be examined within the framework of web conferencing, web cast, and online teaching and learning. An annotated bibliography and extensive glossary related to online professional development are included in this chapter.

INTRODUCTION

Professional development (PD) is an important source of growth for practitioners as well as faculty working in academia. Even though a valued activity, most people are less than enthusiastic about scheduling the time needed for workshops, seminars, and other venues for learning the practical aspects and skills in their profession. Less than desirable experiences with the one-shot workshop, time constraints both professionally and personally, economic changes leading to shortfalls related

to salaries, resources, and opportunity for travel have led to an increasing interest in online education. For practitioners and faculty in education, opportunities for online professional development are becoming attractive alternatives to traditional methods for professional growth. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a knowledge base for environments, tools, benefits, current best practices, and sources for quality online professional development (OnLPD).

The National Staff Development Council remains a strong advocate for teachers by grounding the organization's research in professional development. Much of what they do is based on

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-5780-9.ch012

the definition of the term *professional development*--“a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement” (NSDC, 2011). Teaching as a function of university and college faculty can adopt a similar definition. The comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving faculty effectiveness could be described as teaching practices grounded in research, focused productivity as a scholar, and thoughtful service to the academy or community. Teaching and research understandably require support through professional development (PD) activities. One does not usually associate activities in professional *service* with professional development, however we make the choice to grow professionally through these service oriented tasks. Teaching springs forth from our life-long pursuit of learning. Inquiry is the driving force behind our learning. Whether concepts, principles, or skills, inquiry leads to learning, and ultimately, is translated into our knowledge base. As academics, we like to think of knowledge as entirely delivered to the student, yet as we entered 20th century classrooms it was discovered that learning is generated within the learner (Dewey, 1916, 1991). Transformation was needed to move students from the receiver of information to problem solvers capable of generating solutions and new ideas; thus began the age of constructivism with the learner as the central focus of instruction. Teacher-centered lectures, while useful for presentation of base knowledge, were often being replaced with small group dialog and Socratic questioning (Davis, 2007). Learning becomes deeper, more durable as students personalize concepts. Through small group discussion, there are connections between concepts and authentic life experiences (Innes, 2007). Traditionally, the instructional use of small groups was designed as face to face interaction in the classroom; however, group dialog has become a common instructional method used within the design of online instruction (Courtney & King, 2009).

Research has shown that fostering teachers’ ability to use student-centered approaches has been associated with use of online professional development (Vrasidas & Zembylas, 2004). Teachers have been able to maintain a sustained community of practice while engaged in constructivist learning experiences. This is important because professional development for teachers goes beyond skills-based training sessions. Developing as a professional is a formative process in which we engage in learning, self-assessment, reflection, and communication with others. Whether in a lab setting or online, a systematic process must be employed for change in teaching practices to occur. The process follows known strategies within the field of educational technology beginning with needs and task analysis, learner analysis, and follow-through with use of appropriate strategies, resources, and evaluation (Molenda, 2011). Online Professional Development (OnLPD) is effective when designed to include opportunities for collaborative dialog, applied problem solving, and sustained support through team teaching and peer mentoring (Treacy, 2002). In addition, teachers must be able to adapt to new modes of communication. Both the presenter and participant are experiencing a wide range of possibilities using online environments (Pillai, 2009). All of these lead to change in how educators grow in the profession. New modes of teaching and learning will require intentional commitment to professional development.

In an article archived in the online version of *Education Week*, Price (1993) describes changes in how children learn demanded extensive professional development for teachers.

...In recent years a consensus has emerged that students will need certain higher-order competencies, such as creative thinking and problem-solving, in order to function in the 21st century. Cultivating those competencies will require mastery by educators of new modes of teaching and learning. In order for reform to reach beyond the motivated few

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