

Chapter 55

Preparing and Training Higher Education Faculty to Ensure Quality Online Learning and Teaching

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors discuss the nature of quality online instruction from the perspectives of equity, quality preparation, professional development, and evaluation. Specifically, the authors describe the need for faculty preparation in pedagogical and andragogical practices in general by defining “quality” and qualified professionals. The authors provide initial support for instructors by describing the lesson planning cycle as a useful framework. The authors also delve into the importance of considering one’s personal teaching philosophy as a grounding for quality instruction. Then, the authors apply these concepts to online andragogy and the need for continuing professional development opportunities. Next, the authors describe three evaluation tools/opportunities, rubric for online instruction, the quality online learning and teaching instrument, and quality matters, that have been useful to faculty at their institution. Finally, the authors conclude with future research directions regarding quality online instruction.

INTRODUCTION

Education, whether intentional or not, has always been a platform for self-improvement, an exchange of ideas, and an opportunity for social justice. These three levels of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal growth are hallmarks of a just, formal education system. Accordingly, the content, tools, methods, and platforms that instructors use should be intentional, inclusive, and of high quality. However,

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in the pursuit of this educational excellence, higher education has always faced these essential questions: What is quality instruction? For whom are these educational experiences designed? Who is qualified to provide the instruction? And, who gets to make these decisions? These issues of quality, access, qualifications, and decision making are intensified in our modern era of online learning. In this chapter, we directly address these questions by examining the need for quality online instruction, the need for initial faculty training, the need for ongoing faculty training and professional learning communities, the existence of evaluation tools for online instruction, and make some predictions regarding the future for faculty training in online education.

Need for Quality Online Instruction

Undoubtedly there has been an explosion of educational opportunities offered online. These opportunities range from community education to high school courses to individual online courses for college credit to entire programs, degrees, and institutions that are only offered online. This explosion of new online education opportunities can help meet the needs of underserved communities. Specifically, online education can increase access to content regardless of location (Stich & Reeves, 2017). The use of technology in online education can also improve access for individuals with special needs through the use of screen readers, closed captioning, and variable video speed and replay (Dell, Dell, & Blackwell, 2015). There is also increased access due to timing and flexibility in schedules for courses that are offered asynchronously or in blended learning settings (Kay, Li, & Markovich, 2016). There is also increased access to materials (i.e., open educational resources; <https://www.oercommons.org/>; McGreal, 2013) and experts in specific fields through massive open online course (MOOCs).

Online classes can also take advantage of tools to help instructors improve access to content, faculty, and peers (e.g., participation rubrics, Roblyer & Wiencke, 2003; workload reduction checklist, Dunlap, 2005; enhanced information technology delivery, Educause, <https://www.educause.edu/>; how-to videos, Lynda, <https://www.lynda.com/>). Specifically, educators can use new technology to improve communication through video, chat, and discussion boards, which can enable everyone's voice to be heard. These designed interactions can improve student satisfaction and may improve student achievement (Oyarzun, Stefaniak, Bol, & Morrison, 2018). New technology can help with automated grading which can help faculty provide targeted feedback and modify instruction. For example, plagiarism checkers such as Turnitin, Quetext, or Grammarly not only help students be aware of their own issues in attribution and citation, but can also be used to structure peer reviews, provide feedback, and evaluate student work (Li & Li, 2017).

However, each of these advantages in access and instructional tools can have some unintended negative impacts. At the institutional level, many for-profit online programs have been predatory in their recruitment and enrollment of students (US Department of Education, 2017). While promised access to education, students were burdened with debt and no skills for gainful employment (Carey, 2017). Specifically, instead of ameliorating issues of access, the technology can exacerbate it by unintentionally increasing the digital divide (Hansen & Reich, 2015; Van Deursen & Helsper, 2015). For example, online courses that are not mindful of the technology tools used could become a financial or technological-skill barrier to students. Courses that require high bandwidth may be inaccessible to students who live in tech deserts (i.e., places with limited cellular service or broadband). Additionally, instructors who design online courses without consideration of accessibility as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act and applied to higher education make access and learning unduly difficult.

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