

Online Professional Development Design Elements For Adult Educators New to Online Teaching

Summary

Adult literacy and basic education programs in North America are seeking cost-efficient, convenient, and seamless ways to serve enrolled and potential students, to reduce waiting lists for classes, and to increase student persistence. As a result, the number of distance education courses and supplementary learning opportunities delivered online or in blended online and face-to-face formats continues to grow. Similarly, to enable convenient and cost-effective access for teachers and other practitioners, online and blended professional development also is expanding. If there were increased funding for adult literacy and basic skills distance education or online learning, there would be significantly increased need for highly skilled online teachers. The move from traditional, face-to-face instruction to online or blended learning would require that classroom teachers and tutors develop good instructional strategies for online teaching. This document can provide a framework for states to create online professional development for training adult literacy and basic education instructors who want to learn to teach online, for those who design online learning, and for those who manage online and blended learning programs.

Each of the five tables in this document describes the elements of successful online professional development (OPD) for one of these adult literacy/basic education practitioner audiences:

- Instructional developers/designers of online learning (IDs)
- Teachers/instructors/facilitators
- Managers/administrators/coordinators of online learning programs
- Course content/subject matter experts (SMEs) and
- The instructional development team as a whole.

The design elements include management considerations for real-time and asynchronous online programs, and instructional considerations for an online or blended delivery system. The tables include the following kinds of information:

- Recruitment of *teacher* participants for OPD training
 - Screening/assessment of teachers' skills and experiences in adult education teaching, online teaching, and integrating technology in the traditional classroom
- Recruitment of *student* participants for online learning
 - Screening and assessment of potential online learners
- Sound approaches and practices in online teaching and learning
- Communication with participants
 - Communicating effectively with *teacher* participants in an online PD course
 - How online teachers can communicate effectively with their online *students*
- How online teachers can develop and maintain students' interest
- How to design an online course, curriculum, or online (self-study) learning plan
- Evaluating online or blended learning, and

- Follow-up after teacher training/professional development in online or blended learning.

Goal

The primary goal of *Online Professional Development Design Elements for Adult Educators New to Online Teaching* (referred to from here on as *Design Elements*) is to help adult literacy education professional developers who are creating or refining online professional development for the adult education community. This guide is to help teachers, instructional developers, online content/subject matter experts, and online project managers who are not experienced with online instruction to successfully deliver online learning.

Rationale

Design Elements represents some of the best thinking and experience in the adult literacy education field about professional development for online teaching and learning. It is not a model online course, but rather a set of design elements with recommendations, considerations and guidance that could be used in designing a high quality online course or other online or blended professional development opportunity related to online teaching and learning.

Process for Developing the Design Elements Document, and Our Discoveries

In December, 2008, in an online discussion forum of the National Institute for Literacy and Association for Adult Literacy Professional Development (AALPD), David J. Rosen commented: *One of the adult literacy education delivery models that has great promise, but that will require significant new and additional professional development, is online learning. This is especially useful for programs that involve initial face-to-face training and/or education and then job placement, where there is still need for continued education once the person is working, but because of the work schedule there is not much opportunity to attend classes. A blended model, that involves some face-to-face, perhaps one or two Saturdays a month, and 4-10 hours a week of online learning might be an ideal model for some people in this situation. **Currently there are very few adult literacy education teachers who have been trained to do online teaching. If online or blended learning significantly expands, there will be a "labor shortage" of these teachers...If there were a small group of people who were interested not just in discussing this, but also working on developing a PD design for online adult literacy education teaching, perhaps they could organize themselves in an online workgroup (using Officezilla, Community Zero, a Google or Yahoo group and/or a wiki).***

There was a good response, and David organized an online work group. Over twenty volunteers subscribed, several with a great deal of experience in training adult literacy and basic education teachers to do online course development, instruction and management. Fourteen people, over a period of about a month clarified the work to be done and worked on this guide. Major writers included: Crystal Hack, Leslie Petty, and David J. Rosen. Other contributors included Kathy Tracey, Duren Thompson, Bonnie Odiorne, Gilda Rubio-Festa, Rebeca Fernandez, Joy Zamierowski, Joyce Bogdan, Destiny Long, George Demetron, Jenifer Vanek and Gina Lobaccaro. The work tasks

included posting of participant profiles, joining a threaded discussion, and collective online writing and editing of this document. As we thought and wrote together we discovered that the initial audience to be trained, instructors, needed to be broadened to include administrators, instructional developers and subject matter experts, and that part or all of the online PD courses might need to be tailored to each of these groups. We discovered that some people had joined our work group primarily as learners, that some who thought they had the time to work on this project when they joined later found that they didn't, and that several persisted to write and edit this document.

Relationship to Professional Development Standards

These design elements, taken as a whole, are consistent with the Association of Adult Literacy Professional Developers' Standards and Indicators that were developed in 2008. <http://www.aalpd.org/AALPDStandardsandIndicatorsFinal.doc> . The following standards are especially pertinent to this guide:

- 9. Builds learning communities that foster collaboration and peer learning among practitioners,*
- 10. Requires leadership at the state and local levels that promotes effective professional development and fosters continuous instructional improvement, and*
- 11. Provides policies and guidelines to support practitioners in accessing and benefiting from quality professional development.*

Research Needed

This document is based on professional wisdom, upon the experience of those who have been providing online professional development to adult literacy education practitioners. There is much, however, that we do not yet know. Research is needed to answer questions such as: Which adult learner skills or learning styles are best reinforced through an online learning environment? How might one read/write/communicate differently in face-to-face and online environments? Which combinations of online or face-to-face modalities and media are most effective? How can we provide the necessary online learning support to adult learners, especially to those with learning disabilities?

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