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Preparing for and Thriving in K-12 Online/ Blended Teaching Contexts

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Panel on Preparing for and Thriving in K-12 Online/Blended Teaching Contexts

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Abstract: This panel will bring together leading experts to explore the research related to teaching roles in K-12 online and blended learning and the policies influencing teacher preparation for online environments. Currently, there is a dire need for teacher education programs to provide training in online pedagogy and instructional design so all teachers are prepared to teach in breakthrough learning environments. Keryn Pratt will present her work on OtagoNet: One region's model for virtual schooling in New Zealand and the knowledge and skills teachers need to be successful in this environment. Michael Barbour will focus on roles of online and blended teachers, while Leanna Archambault will examine state-level educational policy pertaining to the preparation of teachers for online and blended settings, offering policy recommendations based on an analysis of existing statutes.

Introduction

This panel will delve into the research dealing with teaching roles in K-12 online and blended learning. This topic is significant to the field of information technology and teacher education because there is a dire need for teacher education programs to provide training in pedagogy and instructional design so all teachers are prepared to teach in breakthrough learning environments.

Leanna Archambault will lead the panel discussing changes to state-level policy resulting in an increasing number of states adding specific educational policies governing virtual schooling (Bailey, Patrick, Schneider, Vander Ark, 2013). For example, states such as Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Michigan, and Virginia have added requirements for students to complete an online learning experience in order to graduate (Watson, Murin, Vashaw, Gemin, & Rapp, 2013). In addition to requirement statutes, Florida state law has mandated that all school districts offer some form of online learning (Digital Learning Now Act, 2011), and Michigan recently approved state policy changes allowing students and parents the right to choose up to two online courses per term while maintaining enrollment in their local districts (Michigan Public Act 129, 2012).

The surge in enrollments brought about by student interest and policy changes has not, however, been coupled with an increased emphasis on preparing educators to teach in online and blended contexts (Archambault, 2011). At present only a handful of states (Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Louisiana, Michigan, Minnesota, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Utah) have adopted online teacher standards or training requirements and/or have created a state-level teaching license dealing with online teaching, varying greatly in terms of certification, prescriptiveness, and oversight. A selection of state models will be discussed with particular emphasis on implications and consequences, and both intended and unintended consequences of state-level policy pertaining to teacher preparation/development for online/blended learning contexts.

Keryn Pratt will be presenting her work on OtagoNet: One region's model for virtual schooling in New Zealand. Since 2002, teachers in one region of New Zealand have been

teaching senior secondary students (the equivalent of Grades 10 - 12) using a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous technology, including videoconferencing, email, and Google apps (Pratt & Pullar, 2013). A number of research projects have investigated this online and blended learning environment, exploring a range of issues including the effectiveness of this mode of learning, and the support students need to be effective through surveys, interviews and focus groups. This presentation would report on what this body of research has identified to be the knowledge and skills teachers need to be successful in this environment. In addition, the changes in teachers' perceptions about what was needed will be reported. While initially teachers focused on the technical skills required to use the equipment, they found that the more important skills were related to the change in pedagogy required to teach in this environment. In a number of cases, this change of pedagogy in turn affected how they taught classes in a traditional classroom environment.

Michael Barbour will discuss the research into three roles of online and blended teachers. When considering the act of teaching in the K-12 online learning environment, one thing that scholars generally agree upon is that the traditional role of the teacher has changed. In a traditional classroom environment, the teacher is responsible for designing the instructional activities that the students complete. The classroom teacher is also responsible for the presentation of the content or the actual act of teaching the material. Finally, the classroom teacher is responsible for facilitating the work completed by the students as they practice their mastery of the content. However, within the K-12 online learning environment each of these responsibilities often falls upon two or three different individuals. In one of the first systematic initiatives to examine the role of the teacher in the K-12 online learning environment, the "Teacher Education Goes Into Virtual Schooling" introduced and oriented new and current teachers to the three different teacher roles performed in the K-12 online learning environment:

- Virtual School Designer – Design instructional materials. Works in team with teachers and a virtual school to construct the online course, etc.
- Virtual School Teacher – Presents activities, manages pacing, rigor, etc.. Interacts with students and their facilitators. Undertakes assessment, grading, etc.
- Virtual School Site Facilitator – Local mentor and advocate for students(s). Proctors & records grades, etc.

Finally, common themes among the panelists related to the necessary skills required for successful teaching in K-12 online and blended contexts, together with ways to ensure the development of such skills, will be discussed.

List of Panelists

1. Leanna Archambault, Assistant Professor, Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College, Arizona State University, USA
2. Keryn Pratt, Senior Lecturer, College of Education, University of Otago, New Zealand

3. Michael Barbour, Director of Doctoral Studies and Assistant Professor, Sacred Heart University, USA