

BOOK REVIEW

Virtual Mentoring for Teachers: Online Professional Development Practices

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Virtual Mentoring for Teachers: Online Professional Development Practices
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In the last twenty years there has been a clear true revolution in instruction and learning processes in Higher Education: the impact of e-learning and the appearance of online instruction addressed to students of varied profiles and situations. This is especially relevant if we bear in mind that, at the same time, and more powerfully, in the developed countries, online instruction has generated its own significant educational space. So, the text at hand tries to present, thoroughly and neatly, one of the aspects that has gathered the least attention: the online instructor's instruction, the processes that make a good online instructor, and the mechanisms needed for their professional development and their best educational practice. The authors put forth a simple, yet crucial question: instruct-

ing e-learning instructors involves an online technology training plan for adults. We could argue two big challenges converge here: online training for adults. This text attempts to change our traditional view upon a matter that can hardly leave anyone indifferent. It discusses the essential matter: having the instructor as the object of analysis and their training process as a good online instructor as a professional project. In fact, the use of the term 'instructor' is not gratuitous: "The term instructor will be used to include both higher education faculty and instructors" (p. 3); or the use of the concept 'professional development' as a synonym of permanent training (p. 5).

This is therefore an especially relevant text for the systematic analysis of the ways to offer online educators systems of training and improvement, teaching planning, and tools for continuous improvement of what we could call this new E-Pedagogy.

It comprises 16 chapters on this subject by prestigious authors from several universities (USA, Canada, New Zealand). The internal sense with which they have been arranged

allows us to establish some big sections in the text. For instance, up to chapter three, the contributions deal with introducing models and principles about Online Instruction. Some big concepts appear that we will use repeatedly in our environment, such as *Transformative Learning*, *Experiential Learning*, or the most alternative one, *Andragogy*, to refer to pedagogy for adults. The first chapter lays the foundations of the concept's boundaries and its applications, clarifies definitions, and leads the way for the rest. Chapters 2 and 3 delve into specific and determining aspects. Especially, we recommend the study of the section on "*First Principles of Motivation to Learn and E³-Learning*" and the role of *Teaching Assistants (TA's)*. To sum up, the nine suggestions (p. 38) make up an especially relevant document. Chapter 3 deals with an idea very much in vogue, Multi-modal Professional Development, trying to summarize a simple, yet complicated idea: the need to accept, in Higher Education institutions, that instructors must have a multiple, diverse, ever-changing, and quickly-adaptable profile. Some Designing Instruction choices are discussed based on a systematic model that has to be analyzed: ADDIE (*Analyze, Design, Developmental, Implementation and Evaluation*) (p.45).

Chapters 4 and 5 introduce the aspects of collaborative learning and the importance of managing common networks among instructors. Two important concepts appear in chapter 4: "*Courselets*" for online training for instructors in instructional packages (p. 68); and "*Networked Learning Framework*" (NLF) (p. 69). In this context, figure 1 summarizes

the network model we must remember. Pages 76-78 display the completely thorough list to bear in mind in this topic.

From this point onward, in the following chapters until the end of the text, different models and experiences about online training for adults are discussed. In some cases, they focus on rather theoretical aspects (like chapter 7), or present lists of concrete and specific elements (like chapter 9), and even aspects concerning strategic design (like chapter 15).

Each and every one of those contributions will not be mentioned here, but two important considerations need to be highlighted: i) all of them deal with current issues and are innovative concerning online training for adults; and ii) they make us revise certain concepts that should lead Higher Education institutions to a new level regarding online training, and not only for adults, actually.

Finally, we must note a line of thought present in the text, formally and informally, and which should be considered a genuine theoretical axis of what the text puts forward: Instructional Technology is an element on which there has been little reflection so far. In general, it has been invited into training processes in Higher Education, but its boundaries were never clear. Neither were its performance in terms of efficiency and efficacy—as proposed in the text—and its repercussion on the instructors' professional project. This text is an excellent document for that purpose and its chapters contain the final list on which we must reflect for the future design of online training for adults and the role of technology in training processes.

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