Facilitator Training Program

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Purpose

The purpose of the facilitator training program is to provide the necessary skills to future or current educators aiming at expanding their teachings from ground courses to distant learning course environments (online courses).

Vital Information in the Facilitator Training

The audiences for the facilitator training program are current or future teachers and educators interested in attaining the necessary skills and understanding to conduct distance learning courses, also referred to as online courses.

Participants in the facilitator training program currently hold certifications as educators, have Bachelors or higher post-secondary degrees, and are currently actively practicing as educators or are in the process of joining the career field as educators. The current skill sets include a clear understanding of basic teaching skills, rubric design, curriculum design, pedagogy and andragogy.

Participants have possibly taken an online course during their own educational pursuit, and or have learned from their previous students of their online courses and experiences. Co-workers may have shared their own online/distance learning experiences.

Participants are assumed to know how to create and design their course syllabus, class material, student handouts, rubric, and assignment design as related to the course content requirements. Participants further have a clear understanding of either pedagogy, andragogy, or both teaching styles.

The training program goals are to increase the participant’s abilities and skills to effective conduct distance learning courses (online courses). Emphasis is on the success of effectively conducting distant learning courses and the characteristics necessary to be an effective facilitator.

Upon completion of the facilitator training program, participants will have a clear understanding of the necessary characteristics needed to be an effective distance learning educator/facilitator. Able to successfully create a syllabus and assignments to provide the highest learning experience for the students, and engage students in a positive manner in group assignments and discussions.

A daily quiz will be provided to the participants to review information retention of the lectured and discussed material in the training. The success of the program can be evaluated by the retention cap of at least 65% of all material covered per training day virtue the daily quizzes.

Facilitator Skills and Instructional Materials

Facilitators must attain the skills to effectively manipulate the online course program in order to provide the maximum amount of guidance, instruction, expectation, and availability to the students. Skills needed to create effective distance learning include the passion to teach, organizational skills, highly motivated, enthusiastic and the desire to have their students succeed in the course. The facilitator must provide clear objectives to the student; provide clear instructions for each assignment, and guidance on how to complete the assignment. As the distance learning environment is lacking the face to face interaction, the facilitator must be able to engage his students in distant learning discussions, setting clear expectations, time limits, and provide continuous feedback and oversight in the group discussions to keep the students on task.

The facilitator allows students to take charge of their learning and provides a strong presence in the distant learning environment with expert guidance provided to the students in their courses.

Strategies used to teach the participants the importance of skills is the engagement of the participants in group discussions for each topic and providing examples as to the impact without the aforementioned skills traits.

Phases of development are divided amongst five categories. The categories are broken down into visitor, novice, apprentice, insider, and master. (Palloff & Pratt, 2011, Chapter 1)

Visitor is the facilitator that thought about teaching distant learning courses but never did. The use of technology has been contemplated and may have used email for assignment submission.

The novice is the facilitator that never has taken a distant learning course and may have taken an online course themselves as a student. The novice also uses some technologies to supplement their communication means in lieu of face to face contact such as text, email, blog.

Apprentice is a facilitator that has taught a couple of courses in distant learning and are developing skills needed for online learning and gathering the understanding for distant learning.

Insiders are the facilitators that have taught numerous distant learning classrooms, are satisfied with their teaching performance, know how to work the online technology, gained the basic skills, and even designed distant learning courses.

The master have it made. They mastered all aspects of teaching distant learning courses and are mentoring and providing assistance or guidance to other faculty in the online environment.

The transitions between the phases can be best described in a five stage method in online faculty development. In stage one, the teacher is the learner. This is where information is gathered to attain the skills and knowhow to be a distant course facilitator. Stage two is when the teacher becomes the adopter. In this stage, the teacher explores various technology methods to teach and shares their information with peers. Stage three the teacher becomes the co-learner and a relationship is formed between the use of technology and how the curriculum is delivered. In the fourth stage, the teacher determines his appropriate teaching style. The final stage, the teacher becomes the leader. He has mastered the distant learning style and becomes a mentor for other faculty. (Palloff & Pratt, 2011, Chapter 1)

Theories for distant learning include transformation, framing and emergence. As Haythornthwaite & Andrews (2011) identified, these three are the “foundational notions associated with learning theory that help lay” the groundwork. Transformation is the state where we realize that change is occurring. The framing is the knowledge forming state based on current and past experience. In the emergence state, we continue to excel and expand our learning. (pg.28)

Management and Technology Tools

Mentoring programs are vital for success. Masters in their field provide invaluable guidance and lessons to newcomers of distant learning. The objectives of a mentoring program are to provide visitors, novice, apprentices, and insiders with additional resources to succeed in their knowledge gathering and advancement. A mentor provides expertise from their own experiences, trials and experiments with practices, theories, and teaching methods.

There are several key points that must be viewed in selecting a mentor and those key points include the mentor’s performance status, the quality and amount of time teaching distant learning courses, the success rate of the courses, and what their own criteria is in order to succeed. The mentor must have past and current working experience with distant learning in order to be up-to-date on current technology and teaching methods.

Management and evaluation programs for facilitators are an important step in any environment. It is crucial that courses and facilitators alike are monitored for quality control, that the learning objectives and student’s needs are met.

The challenge in the distant learning management is the lack of face to face interaction but this is easily overcome with the integration of technology utilizing video and phone conferencing with multiple peers in real time.

Utilizing a learning management system platform (LMS) provides the facilitator and institution to create, deliver and track the overall learning process in distant learning. There are numerous software products on the market like EZ LCMS, absorb LMS, Grovo, ExpertusONE, Spoke, and the list continues. Determining the most suitable program would have to be tested and implemented by the facilitator and institution.

The platforms provide the ability to the facilitator to post presentations in video/lecture formats, create class discussions, or hold private discussions with students to provide personal feedback on learning material or issues students may have. Distribution and receipt of assignments would be tracked via the software, and feedback/grading would be easily managed.

There are several methods of engaging student learning and technology is one of the best tools available, especially in the distant learning environment. Video uploads to YouTube and links to the video provided to the students will have a positive impact on student learning, especially when it is linked with a group discussion in an online forum like a blog. Another method is the use of visuals and infographics. Both are similar but distinct in their available features.

Issues and Classroom Management

There are many technology venues that can be used in distance learning collaboration as previously discussed. The most commonly used means to communicate is the classroom platform. Looking at the same thing over and over can become boring and unattractive. A tool that can be used to increase the “energy flow” in topic discussions is using Wikis or Blogs. Any method used, the facilitator must maintain a presence in the forums, Wikis, Blogs, classroom platforms to provide guidance, monitor the discussions, and maintain peace and order.

Things we have to keep in mind that meanings are lost in written contexts. We lack the body language, the tone of voice, the demeanor of the person spoken too. Read contents can quickly be taken out of context and therefore it is important that as facilitators we not only keep this in mind for our written communication, but the communication from our students too.

Meetings like video conference between group members of a learning team with the facilitator can bridge the communication gaps and make the learning experience even more engaging. Both the facilitator and students can provide feedback during video conferences that can be crucial for success.

Challenging behaviors everyone can relate to in some shape or form. We have encountered a facilitator, person, or student that made inappropriate comments or posts, lack of participation or engagement, and even bullying behavior. Life experiences help identify issues and appropriate corrective actions need to be taken to remedy the issue.

References

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