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Training Doctoral Students to Teach Online

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Abstract

Many rehabilitation counseling students prefer online courses because of their accessibility, convenience, portability, and flexibility. To address the demand, online courses in rehabilitation counselor education programs have continued to grow, and faculty are recognizing a need to train doctoral students in the delivery of online rehabilitation counselor education courses. This article reviews the use of online learning and successful practices that distance educators use, and describes how online learning can be taught to doctoral students using Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory.

Online learning grew from being virtually nonexistent in 1991 to including more than 2.35 million students annually in 2004 (Adams, 2007). The rate of enrollment for online higher education students surpassed the total growth rate of all higher education students (Allen & Seaman, 2008). Furthermore, the proportion of undergraduate students in the United States taking at least one online course rose from 16% in 2003-2004 to 20% in 2007-2008 (U.S. Department of Education [DOE], 2011). In that academic year, 22% of graduate students took online courses and 9% took an entire program online (USDOE,

2011). Given the high demand for doctoral training in rehabilitation counseling (Shultz & Millington, 2007) and the rapid growth of online learning (Adams, 2007), educators should be prepared to deliver online instruction as well as face-to-face instruction (An et al., 2008).

Online education includes a range of skills from teaching to course development and either synchronous or asynchronous electronic delivery of course content to accommodate differences in time, space, and physical ability (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools [SACS], 2010). Online instruction uses course management software, including *Blackboard*, *Sakai*, and *Moodle*, which presents information via online lectures, self-guided tutorials, articles, videos, and webinars. Course management software also provides the means to assess students through the use of quizzes, exams, and papers. In addition to teaching faculty how to use course management software, some universities are held to faculty training guidelines for online instruction by accrediting bodies such as the SACS (SACS Commission on Colleges, 2011). Individual institutions expand on the requirements by encouraging faculty to participate in continuing online education (Schrum, Burbank, Engle, Chambers, & Glassett, 2005). Continuing online education and consulting an educational technologist (Bennett & Lockyer, 2004) can help faculty with course development, delivery, and management, as well as the creation of electronic portfolios, taping of lectures, web conferencing, and a wide range of communication options. Institutions whose libraries offer an embedded librarian program can also assist faculty and students with online research, writing, and material procurement specific to course content (Crozier, Blevins, McMillian, & Hudson, 2009).

Distance learning has clearly become part of the university landscape. Despite this, there has been little research by rehabilitation faculty on the training of doctoral students to serve as future online educators. It is unclear whether faculty in rehabilitation counseling (RC) education programs are addressing the need to prepare doctoral students to teach online courses. This article examines the literature on preservice doctoral education training in distance learning and suggests integrating online teaching strategies using Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT; Kolb, Boyzatis, & Mainemelis, 2001).

Characteristics of Successful Online Learning

Online learning is technologically challenging and multidimensional, requiring a complex skill set for the student. Successful online students not only have computer and Internet access, but they also know how to use technology to connect with online peers and faculty to build a virtual professional community (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008). These students are successful because they are able to self-regulate and project positive expectations for online learning. If students expect to learn, they possess a "can do" attitude and take the responsibility necessary for learning success. This personal responsibility for learning success is essential when courses are delivered asynchronously (Bell & Akroyd, 2006). Should motivation be a problem, Simpson (2012) suggested using both academic and non-academic support services. Further, online students can take advantage of technology-based resources such as library portals, hypertext links, digitized videos, embedded librarians, educational technologists, and online writing labs as they focus on the instructional material rather than the technological delivery system (Taylor, 1995).

Characteristics of Successful Online Teaching

Successful online faculty can facilitate the success of their students. They are cognizant that online students may view them “as the embodiment of the course and institution” (Comas-Quinn, 2011, p. 219). They have knowledge of the “know-why, know-how, and know-what” (Madhavaram & Laverie, 2010, p. 202) of online learning, based on practice and application. Their online teaching practices include course management, enthusiasm, adaptation to student needs, creation of a sense of community, respect for students, and communication that is regular, positive, prompt, open, and clear (Cole, 2009; Lee, 2008; Lewis & Abdul-Hamid, 2006; Young, 2006). Edwards, Perry, and Janzen (2011) found that “exemplary online educators are challengers, affirmers, and influencers” (p. 107) who have the ‘high-touch’ communication skills, such as frequent communication and engagement, that Aspden and Helm (2004) espouse. Collectively, these characteristics of effective online faculty reflect the ‘community of inquiry’ model that blends cognitive, social, and teaching realms via curriculum design, teaching strategies, and technology integration to help online students in different locations work on assignments asynchronously (Garrison & Anderson, 2003; Garrison & Vaughan, 2008).

Faculty roles as online educators do not fundamentally differ from their roles as on-site educators. There may, however, be more diverse skills, traits, and practices in online faculty roles. These roles range from designer, planner, administrator, librarian, technologist, content facilitator, and manager to advisor, counselor, negotiator, change agent, and assessor (Baran, Correia, & Thompson, 2011). Nevertheless, faculty must be more than the sum of these characteristics and roles (Edwards et al., 2011) in order to achieve competence in online teaching (Baran et al., 2011).

Taylor and McQuiggan (2008) assessed the online needs and experiences of faculty at Pennsylvania State University who had taught at least one course online. Faculty members reported learning the most from instructional designers and other online faculty. According to Taylor and McQuiggan,

Most of the advice involved things one should do before teaching online, including observing an online course, being an online student, working with an instructional designer, talking to colleagues experienced in teaching online, learning the university's course management system, and locating technical assistance. (Findings, para 7)

This research highlights the value of informal sharing, collegial support, and practice of new skills before they need to be applied. Taylor and McQuiggan also acknowledged that successful online teaching requires multiple skills. For example, online teaching requires greater time management and planning skills because of the time needed to construct an effective online course (Frese, 2005). In addition, Bennett and Lockyer (2004) have noted the need for good organizational and archiving skills, such as the ability to transfer files and work with different file formats and operating systems. Thus, an essential requirement for instructors is a thorough understanding of and high self-efficacy toward the online ‘high-tech’ environment (Aspden & Helm, 2004), such as proficiency with computers, software, and the Internet. The online instructor needs the technical skills to operate course management software and the adaptability and flexibility to integrate web-based resources that all students can access (Salmon, 2000). Finally, successful online

instructors must provide detailed instructions and grading rubrics, be sensitive to the special needs of distance learners, regularly communicate with and encourage students, and provide personalized feedback to individual students (Garrison & Vaughn, 2008). Comas-Quinn (2011) suggested that these skills can be learned in dedicated preparatory coursework.

Teaching Counseling Courses Online

For new instructors teaching online, content courses, like counseling theories, may initially be easier to teach than interpersonal skills courses as skill-based courses require developing practice protocol and ethical considerations with regard to online supervision (Doo, 2006; Morissette, Bezyak, & Ososkie, 2012; Trepal, Haberstroh, Duffey, & Evans, 2007). Practice protocol is important since students may feel they have a cognitive understanding of the content so practice is unnecessary. Doo (2006) suggested emphasizing to students that a cognitive understanding does not guarantee successful application of the skill; therefore, learning environments that allow the student to practice these skills are needed. If online counseling skills are being taught and counseling interactions with clients will occur in a chat room or through instant messaging, students and their clients need to be taught to write out their thoughts and feelings, to use emoticons, and learn text abbreviations since nonverbal cues are not available. Students, however, should continue to use proper English to convey professional behavior. Skills used in face-to-face communication are equally important online such as asking only one question at a time and accurately reflecting the content. Online instructors, with the client and student's informed consent, could view the written dialogue to provide the student with feedback on the counseling session (Trepal et al., 2007).

When review of clinical practice skills and clinical supervision are required in the online course, other issues may arise. Morissette et al. (2012) recommended at least one face-to-face supervision session if possible, or a telephone call at minimum, to help the student and supervisor get to know each other better before clinical supervision begins. Limitations to online supervision are the potential lack of contextual clues and the effect on the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Ethical guidelines exist regarding Internet counseling, but ethical standards are still being developed with regard to online supervision. Consideration of confidentiality and online security are key, particularly when using videoconferencing software programs, e-mail, instant messaging, or chat rooms. Protocols for crisis intervention need to be in place as well as "policies... to address confidentiality (informed consent), jurisdictional and legal issues, and technological competence" (Vaccaro & Lambie, 2007, pp. 54-55). Despite these potential challenges for teaching online, research indicates little difference in the acquisition of basic counseling skills between on-site and online students (Murdock, Williams, Becker, Bruce, & Young, 2012).

Training Doctoral Students

Kolb's ELT can be infused into doctoral education or a pedagogy course to help meet training needs of RC education programs and online learning (Kolb et al., 2001).

ELT focuses on the use of experiences in learning. According to this approach, knowledge is grasped through experiencing learning, defined as Concrete Experiences, or by thinking about the experience, defined as Abstract Conceptualization. Experiences are transformed through Reflective Observation by watching someone else perform an activity and by Active Experimentation, or doing the activity oneself.

According to the four-stage learning cycle..., immediate or *concrete experiences* are the basis for observations and *reflections*. These reflections are assimilated and distilled into *abstract concepts* from which new implications for action can be drawn. These implications can be *actively tested* and serve as guides in creating new experiences. (Kolb et al., 2001, p. 228)

Pedagogy in Rehabilitation Counselor Education

Whether faculty in RC education programs are addressing the need to prepare students to teach online courses, in addition to teaching research and content-specific material to their doctoral students, is unknown. In a review of the National Council on Rehabilitation Education membership list of 27 doctoral RC education programs in the United States, only four of the 22 programs whose curriculum could be found online listed a required course on pedagogy. However, these programs may have other ways of mentoring doctoral students in teaching, such as teaching assistantships or a pedagogy course offered as an elective. Brightman (2009) suggested several reasons why doctoral programs do not provide their students training in teaching. A primary reason may be a lack of faculty to spearhead a mentoring program. This lack may exist because faculty are not recognized or rewarded for the time it takes to mentor doctoral students in their teaching, nor are online courses recognized for tenure and promotion. Moreover, for tenure and promotion, teaching may not be rewarded at the same level as research and scholarship. Additionally, faculty may not recognize difficulties with their own teaching (Brightman, 2009), which makes it hard to see the value in training others to teach. There may also be restrictions on program length that preclude the addition of a pedagogy course. Other reasons include limited opportunities for technical training and support, as well as workload disparities (Edwards, 2004). Nonetheless, the increased emphasis on learning outcomes expected by accrediting bodies (SACS Commission on Colleges, 2011) and continuing advancements in technology, underscore the rationale to train doctoral students to deliver online course content effectively and efficiently and suggests the need has never been greater.

Doctoral students need to grasp the challenges of online education thoroughly so that as faculty they can be responsive to individual learning styles (Harley, Jolivet, & McNall, 2004). Integration of the technology for online learning and traditional pedagogy is especially important in training doctoral students. Hopey and Ginsburg (1996) have noted that online learning is not successful when technology steers the course material, but rather courses should remain rooted in education. Thus, it is vital for doctoral students to learn the mechanics of online instruction while following proven pedagogical techniques.

The Importance of Pedagogy Courses

While doctoral students are gaining knowledge about the rehabilitation counseling profession through experiential learning (Kolb et al., 2001), they also need to learn how

to deliver this content to students (Salmon, 2000). Knowledge about a particular subject does not guarantee ability to teach the subject effectively (Norris & Palmer, 1998); that is why participation in a pedagogy course can be especially helpful. Even with pedagogical skills acquired for on-site teaching, such as engaging and assessing students, teacher educators reported poor transference of those skills to the online environment, such that they needed additional technological support (Downing & Dymont, 2013). Teachers need to understand adult learning theory, curriculum and syllabus development, teaching strategies, student needs, methods of evaluating student learning, and ways of functioning within the academic environment (Davis, 2009; Svinicki & McKeachie, 2011), supplemented with knowledge of delivering online course content.

Mentors can be effective in helping doctoral students learn how to teach (Norris & Palmer, 1998), especially when mentoring is coupled with enrollment of students in a pedagogy course. As a teaching assistant in a course, the doctoral student can observe online, teach one or more classes, help the faculty mentor with or learn about grading assignments, provide feedback to students, create examinations, and answer student questions. The mentoring experience helps students reflect upon what they are learning in the pedagogy course. Additionally, the pedagogy course can require students to evaluate syllabi, develop their own syllabus, provide instruction on a teaching strategy to classmates, share a digital recording of their teaching, and summarize their teaching experience at the end of the semester. Throughout the course, doctoral students can learn and grow from these different assignments.

Not all doctoral students can take a pedagogy course, but there are other ways of shaping doctoral students into competent online instructors using experiential learning (Kolb et al., 2001). Doctoral students can benefit from taking online courses themselves and from having a faculty mentor when they first begin teaching (Norris & Palmer, 1998). The mentor can meet with the doctoral student before the course begins to discuss course objectives, the syllabus, course content (Norris & Palmer, 1998), and provide insights into teaching. Additionally, the faculty mentor can observe the student teaching on multiple occasions and provide constructive feedback on handling of the class and presentation skills. If a student is receiving internship credit for the teaching experience (Norris & Palmer, 1998), the mentor may complete midterm and final evaluations to provide feedback to the student. Seminars with current and former doctoral student instructors and faculty can provide supplementary learning opportunities (Norris & Palmer, 1998). With each course taught, the need for mentoring should decrease. Table 1 gives a summary of Kolb's four stage, cyclical ELT and sample pedagogy strategies for doctoral RC education students.

Although there is little literature on the preparation of doctoral RC students for online course delivery, Madhavaram and Laverie (2010) investigated the preparation of doctoral students in marketing programs and identified several components of pedagogical competence. They include knowledge of course content and pedagogical approaches, course and classroom management capabilities, and skills in individual student management. Madhavaram and Laverie pointed out that this latter skill can be especially challenging in the online education environment since nonverbal cues are missing. They recommend that doctoral students observe faculty throughout their institution whose online teaching has been recognized as exemplary.

Table 1

Description of Kolb's ELT stages with sample pedagogy strategies

Kolb's ELT stages (Kolb et al., 2001)	Description	Sample strategies in a doctoral pedagogy course
Concrete experiences	Gaining knowledge through experiences.	Take an online course; evaluate syllabi; provide instruction on a teaching strategy to classmates; summarize a teaching experience; link online learning technologies with Bloom's Taxonomy
Reflective Observation	Observing others perform with time for reflection.	Observe exemplary faculty; observe an online course or faculty mentor with grading assignments; evaluate syllabi; provide instruction in an online teaching strategy to classmates; share and reflect on a digital recording of their teaching; summarize a teaching experience
Abstract Conceptualization	Thinking about the experience and drawing out new implications.	Evaluate syllabi; discuss the course with the faculty mentor before it begins; provide instruction in an online teaching strategy to classmates; summarize a teaching experience; link online learning technologies with Bloom's Taxonomy
Active Experimentation	Performing activities independently that generates new experiences.	Take an online course; develop a syllabus; deliver content by teaching peers or students online; evaluate syllabi; provide instruction in an online teaching strategy to classmates; share a digital recording of their teaching; summarize a teaching experience; link online learning technologies with Bloom's Taxonomy

Introducing Online Teaching to Doctoral Rehabilitation Counselor Education Students

Doctoral students can learn to teach online in many ways. To begin, doctoral students need to learn the basics of course management software. Some course management platforms offer online, self-guided tutorials, and many universities augment these tutorials with additional trainings in the chosen platform and other computer-assisted technology like Second Life, Mediasite, Smart Board, and recording equipment. Mandernach, Donnelly, Dailey, and Schulte (2005) discussed the need to fine-tune course delivery by ensuring that all links work, confirming that the grade center is accurate, sending announcements, and releasing the course to students. For example, pedagogy courses and doctoral faculty can also suggest ways in which doctoral students who are teaching can enhance their online courses with advanced strategies like synchronous

office hours, live chats, and recording of lectures via Mediasite or Tegrity (USDOE, 2009).

When an institution offers a pedagogy course, the instructor can infuse the traditional course content with segments on online learning since many teaching techniques can be used in both face-to-face and online instruction. Additionally, faculty can work with students to build their own on-site course in a hybrid environment that uses only a few online features. Faculty can gradually introduce more Blackboard features or the software of a different course platform so doctoral students learn about a number of online technologies. This can show students ways to incorporate various online course management platforms and features into online course design and provide students with experiential learning as well as reflection on the value of new online features. These doctoral students are simultaneously teachers and students and they can become increasingly adept at ‘electronic pedagogy’ by weaving together technology, course content, and online community building (Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

Doctoral Student Impressions of Teaching Online

Doctoral students in one rehabilitation counseling program had varied educational and teaching experiences but similar impressions of teaching online. They acknowledged that the steps taken to prepare for teaching online such as outlining the lecture, preparing PowerPoint slides, and posting materials to Blackboard were the same as those used to prepare for a face-to-face course. Differences for the online environment were the importance of intentionality over convenience, the ability to work on his or her own terms to record lectures as the student’s schedule allowed, increased workload, and a challenge to minimize the disconnect between students and instructor. For example, one doctoral student commented, “One of the biggest challenges and things I missed was the lack of interaction with students. I had to gauge if [students] were intrigued, confused, bored, or engaged.”

A doctoral student who had taken a pedagogy class said, “As I prepared my online lecture, I was cognizant of students having different learning styles and needing to apply the three Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles.” According to the Center for Applied Special Technology (2011), these three UDL principles provide multiple means of representation, action and expression, and engagement. The doctoral student who had not yet taken a pedagogy course stated, “In order to prepare myself to conduct an [online] lecture, I went through many of the same steps that I might have taken to provide a lecture in person. I read the textbook, consulted outside journal articles, came up with activities, and put together a PowerPoint. There was a bit more pressure to have all of my preparation done with ‘plenty of polish’ at the moment my [Tegrity] recording began.”

Recommendations

To some extent, doctoral students’ success as RC educators is dependent upon their acquisition of effective teaching skills. Thus, it is imperative for doctoral students today to develop preservice competence in online learning and teaching, blending sensitive delivery of rehabilitation counseling content with technological literacy (Comas-Quinn, 2011). Although a pedagogy course is ideal, even training in teaching

techniques provides a good start for doctoral students (Norris & Palmer, 1998). For students interested in online teaching, it is important to give them an opportunity to teach an online course at their own university or another university. According to Norris and Palmer, the benefits to faculty of having a teaching assistant include the opportunity to gain a different perspective on teaching and to see teaching through the eyes of students. They also found that being a teaching mentor regenerated instructors' enthusiasm for teaching.

Pedagogy courses for doctoral RC students can help them build upon their past learning experiences, adopt a diverse skill set, identify their strengths and preferences, and weave emerging technological advances into their course preparation. To gain experience in online instruction, doctoral students can contact exemplary educators at their own university or contact faculty at other universities whose content knowledge fits with the student's area of interest or whose RC education program is primarily online. Infusing pedagogy courses with online course delivery strategies can help doctoral students enter academia with online teaching skills, many of which bring greater efficiency and potentially higher student opinions of instructors.

Teaching skills can be enhanced by having a teaching mentor, attending classes and/or apprenticeships with master teachers, and attending teaching presentations at conferences. Additionally, learning about the scholarship of teaching through review of the literature, taking a pedagogy course, compiling a teaching portfolio (Madhavaram & Laverie, 2010), or having online colleagues can enhance teaching skills. Some doctoral students and faculty may find that online learning is more time-consuming than traditional teaching (Connolly, Jones, & Jones, 2007), requires more initial setup, and necessitates more communication with students to create and sustain learning communities because of the lack of face-to-face contact (Santilli & Beck, 2005). A support group of doctoral students and faculty teaching online can provide opportunities for the online instructor to gain insights from others and share what was learned. Technical support is also needed for persons who teach online and for their students (Tallent-Runnels, Cooper, Lan, Thomas, & Busby, 2005). Faculty in RC education programs who offer to mentor doctoral students and encourage them to pursue these avenues will be advancing the field of RC while better preparing students as RC educators in the 21st century.

Conclusion

This article examined the literature on preservice doctoral education training in distance learning and suggested integrating online teaching strategies using Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb et al., 2001). While accessibility, convenience, and expanded educational opportunities in a technology expectant era have resulted in an increase in online courses, what remains unknown is if doctoral students in RC counselor education programs are being trained to teach online courses. Moreover, with RC programs adding to the number of online courses they offer, and faculty adopting multiple roles and skills to ensure effective online course delivery, the need to train doctoral students to teach online is underscored. Therefore, faculty in RC education programs should engage doctoral students in online course delivery by teaching them

pedagogical strategies, helping them “to teach online rather than learning to become an online teacher” (Comas-Quinn, 2011, p. 230).

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