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Perceived Best Practices for Faculty Training in Distance Education

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Keywords: learning style; best practices; distance educators; online teaching; transformative learning theory

Abstract: After conducting a literature review of adult student learning styles and teaching method analysis, it became apparent that there was not a significant difference in academic performance for students with differing learning styles whether they attended face-to-face or online classroom environments. What was not clearly indicated though, from the review of the literature, was what were the perceived best practices for online teaching from the perspective of experienced distance educators and whether the *instructors'* perceived learning style was incorporated in training programs to assist faculty to teach online. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative pilot study is to determine the perceived best practices to train faculty to teach in an online environment and how individual instructors' perceived learning styles can be incorporated within best practices to foster competence on an individual instructor level. This study also analyzes faculty resistance to distance education and how transformative learning theory may play a role in overcoming this resistance.

Findings

Upon completion of semi-structured interviews, three themes emerged. They are described below as part of a data display:

Qualitative Data Display of Findings

- Instructor Readiness for Teaching Online
- Online Course-The Magic is in the Redesign
- Students Pursuing Education Online-Be Realistic

Instructor Readiness for Teaching Online

In terms of participant perceptions of best practices for training faculty to teach online, the common theme was the online tools each institution made available to its faculty to learn to teach online and to address faculty resistance.

Online Course-The Magic is in the Redesign

When looking at the perceived best practices to train faculty to teach online, one of the common themes surrounded the course design. How did the course meet the learning outcomes for the students? When designing a course, the participants did consider the teaching philosophy of the instructor but only to the extent it led to determining what was the best way for students to learn. To accomplish this, redesign of the online course may become necessary. The "magic is in the redesign".

Students Pursuing Education Online-Be Realistic

When considering the biggest challenges with online learning from a students' perspective, students needed to be realistic about their expectations when taking a course online and also to address their fear of technology.

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