

A Structured Approach to Online Professional Development

Dr. Janice Carson
Project Director
Idaho Assistive Technology Project

Introduction

Online professional development continues to grow and the migration to this platform has shown to provide a rich environment to reach vast geographic regions, maximize limited content experts, and support sustainability. Expanding assistive technology (AT) content knowledge is a natural fit with distance learning for ease of update, as well as filling the gap of limited instruction in higher education.

Students need AT to participate in standards-based reform

Education professionals have limited AT knowledge

The PreK12 community continues to ebb and flow with the vision of increasing student achievement through standards-based reform. However, in order for students with disabilities to participate in this reform movement, they must have access to the standards-based curriculum, which is often accomplished with assistive technology.

IDEA (2004) Mandate:

- Special consideration
- AT devices and services
- Support the functional needs

The task of considering assistive technology can only be accomplished when there is a member of the IEP team who is knowledgeable about AT.

“Watching how to use the different AT gave me insight into how it really does work. This was meaningful to me as I need to learn how to access AT and then actually use it in my classroom.”

Online training was developed due to the vast geographic region and limited content experts

The six-week professional development course was offered by the College of Education at a public university in the intermountain western United States. This study used a mixed methods analysis including a one-group pretest-posttest design. There were a total of 18 educational professionals including teachers, administrators, and support services staff.

Developing online instruction is not a simple matter. Well-designed online content involves knowledge of both online design and content.

The genesis for the research project was to produce educational leaders who could provide guidance to an IEP team in the AT consideration process

Barriers:

- Foundational content knowledge
- Limited implementation vision
- Large amount of content

A collaboration of subject matter experts (SMEs) and instructional design experts (IDEs) provide positive outcomes for online instruction.

Solutions:

- Real-world, problem-based instruction with multimedia video
- Student examples

Sustainability:

- Download all materials (with speaker notes) and “take it with them”
- Encouraged to share content with their peers

Five Data Collection Procedures:

- 1 Researcher-created achievement instrument
- 2 Focused on teacher attitudes
- 3 Follow-up focus group questions
- 4 Researcher-created AT plan rubric
- 5 Modified Delphi technique



OUTCOME: The participants significantly increased in their content knowledge and indicated positive attitudes toward the online environment. In addition, they codified the consideration process and their ability to operationalize what they had learned through an AT plan.