4-5-2012

The Development and Use of Online Modules for Professional Development in Early Childhood Education

Angela Stone-MacDonald  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, Angela.Stone@umb.edu*

Anne Douglass  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, anne.douglass@umb.edu*

MaryLu Love  
*University of Massachusetts Boston, marylu.love@umb.edu*

Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston

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Recommended Citation  
Stone-MacDonald, Angela; Douglass, Anne; Love, MaryLu; and Institute for Community Inclusion, University of Massachusetts Boston, "The Development and Use of Online Modules for Professional Development in Early Childhood Education" (2012). *Office of Community Partnerships Posters*. Paper 17.  
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The Development and Use of Online Modules for Professional Development in Early Childhood Education

Angi Stone-MacDonald, Ph.D., Anne Douglass, Ph.D., and MaryLu Love, M.S. University of Massachusetts, Boston

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY
- To examine the role of online training modules in professional development for early childhood educators
- To understand the technological capacity of the early childhood workforce for using online professional development
- To examine the challenges/barriers to the field in using online professional development and technology-mediated learning

BACKGROUND
This study builds upon previous work:
- access for professional development through technology (McMaken, Kauerz, DeCesare, & Hale, 2002)
- effective online instruction (Clark, 2004; Pianta, et. al, 2008)
- technology- and trainer-mediated instruction and professional development (Powell, Diamond, & Koehler, 2010)

Massachusetts has implemented an integrated professional development system to support early childhood educators. The Department of Early Education and Care is working to align professional development, QRIS, and EEC Core Competencies, and to engage stakeholders across sectors. The goal of the new system is to support the pathways that lead educators to degree attainment and increased competency and to support providers in attaining and maintaining accreditation and upward movement on QRIS (Douglass, Heimer, and Hagan, 2010).

Coursera is available online worldwide through OpenCourseWare. These courses are designed to be used with a trainer, director/supervisor, for CEU or college credit, or in peer groups. These courses are composed of individual modules that can stand alone or be part of a complete course. The courses are also available in Spanish. The courses are:
- Core Competencies for Early Childhood Educators
- Preschool Learning Guidelines

The trainers are early childhood professionals who work in the early childhood system as leaders. They work in family childcare, Head Start, public and private preschools and centers, public school systems, and after school programs.

GUIDING RESEARCH QUESTIONS
1. What are the technology skills and comfort levels of early childhood educators in Massachusetts?
2. What are the strengths of the online training modules? What challenges/barriers do trainers/educators face in using these courses?

EDUCATOR SURVEY DEMOGRAPHICS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White/Caucasian</td>
<td>36.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>25.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>5.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>22.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decline to Respond</td>
<td>6.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-30</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Master's Degree</td>
<td>52.94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
<td>82.28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate's Degree</td>
<td>84.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDA</td>
<td>78.67%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DATA COLLECTION METHODS
- Educator Survey: Participants were asked to complete the online or paper version of the survey given out by the trainer after completion of at least one module in the course
- Trainer Survey: Trainers completed online surveys after facilitating at least five hours of training
- Survey questions were modeled after national surveys on professional development and early childhood educator demographic surveys
- Focus groups were conducted at the training sessions to discuss how trainers could use the technology and how they would teach the course using technology-mediated practices

RESULTS
- What are the technology skills and comfort levels of early childhood educators?
- 50% of participants felt comfortable using the online modules
- More than 60% said they preferred face-to-face settings for college courses and professional development
- 77% said they were comfortable or very comfortable with computers
- 99% of participants had access to a computer at work or home and 54% had one in both places

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS
1. How feasible is online training for professional development in the future of ECE/CESEI?
2. How can states most effectively use online training to provide high quality content in professional development for educators?
3. What are the best ways to utilize online training within and across states, as well as across borders?

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS
- Participants used computers and the internet on a regular basis for many different purposes and were comfortable with this technology
- Participants still prefer face-to-face interaction and human support in processing and applying professional development training
- The online modules will support trainer interaction and technology-mediated professional development; to support the further education and training of early childhood educators

LESSONS LEARNED
- Participants stated they would be using the online modules in some format for QRIS advancement
- In future data collection, we will look at differences between pre-QRIS and post-QRIS training