

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN K-12 ONLINE AND BLENDED LEARNING:  
EXAMINING PROGRAMS AND PEDAGOGY  
FOR EFFECTIVE TEACHER TRAINING**

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*Guest Editors for the Special Issue, Journal of Online Learning Research*

We are so honored to be the guest editors for this special issue of the *Journal of Online Learning Research* (JOLR) focused on professional development in K-12 online and blended learning environments. In early summer 2015, we accepted the challenge of guest editing, not knowing all that was involved but resting assured that we would have a team of experienced mentors to guide us through this process. We enthusiastically jumped right to work, providing a platform to help others contribute to the growing body of research.

This past year has been a wonderful learning experience for us. Almost immediately after the call for proposals was advertised, we received dozens of emails and phone calls from highly qualified and interested professionals from around the globe who proposed exceptional ideas to include in this special issue. As the deadline approached, we were pleasantly overwhelmed by the variety of well-developed research manuscripts, making the selection process that much more exciting. Although it is always difficult to turn away great work, especially work of those who are clearly passionate and have diligently worked hard in developing their manuscripts for consideration, we do view this as a strong message to the educational community. Professional development (PD) in K-12 online and blended learning is a valuable topic for educational research, best practices remain highly under-reported in the field, and methods to improve online and blended learning should continue to be investigated. The five articles included in this special issue support valuable topics for future academic research.

In this special issue, we are honored to feature a variety of work that focuses on various elements of professional development in K-12 online and blended education. The first article, written by Rebecca Parks, Wendy Oliver, and Elaine Carson, is titled “The Status of Middle and High School Instruction: Examining Professional Development, Social Desirability, and Teacher Readiness for Blended Pedagogy in the Southeastern United States.” This research, motivated by two separate but complimentary past investigations of professional development in K-12 blended learning environments, explores the level of understanding of blended learning pedagogy of middle and high school public educators and the impact of professional development on blended teacher practices.

Somer Lewis and Amy Garrett Dikkers explore a blended co-teaching instructional model in their contribution titled “Professional Development Supports for the Blended, Co-taught Classroom.” Recognizing the intersecting roles of special education and content area teachers, face-to-face and virtual school experiences, and school-to-work transition programs within the North Carolina Virtual Public School’s Occupational Course of Study program, Lewis and Garrett Dikkers investigate how and to what extent the co-teachers are prepared to teach and how they are supported in a blended learning environment. Numerous challenges and gaps in understanding among experienced teachers are identified, aiding in more specific professional development focused on blended learning best practices.

René Quiroz, Nicola Ritter, Yun Ki, Rhonda Newton, and Trupti Palkar investigate the Virtual Instructor Certificate Program (VICP) professional development model for designing standards-based and project-based online courses for K-12 students. The identified professional development model is strongly supported by Mercer’s (2014) Quality Matters (QM) program. The participants engaged in the PD program as online students for six weeks with requirements to complete a hands-on project within the course. The outcomes of this study identify evidence that supports this professional development model, yet illuminate various concerns focused on standard-alignments, course-activity and learning objective relationships, purpose of learning materials, and course feedback response times.

The article “Evaluating Continued Use of an Online Teacher Professional Development Program with a Sustained Implementation Scale,” authored by Clay Rasmussen and David Byrd, uses a sustained implementation scale (SIS) to determine the effectiveness of an online PD program. Rasmussen and Byrd use a causal-comparative analysis paralleling a course titled “Food, Land, and People” to examine a PD program focused on five key characteristics for quality learning as well as its perceived effectiveness based on the continued use of developed materials and lessons over a three-year period.

The results support the need for including the five key characteristics of quality online PD when developing future professional learning courses, as well as other factors that contribute to the continued use of materials and lesson plans developed in a PD course.

Finally, Jeremy Riel, Kimberly Lawless, and Scott Brown investigate the importance of teacher understanding in both pedagogy and delivery of lessons and the technologies to effectively implement blended learning in their article titled “Listening to the Teachers: Using Weekly Online Teacher Logs for ROPD to Identify Teachers’ Persistent Challenges When Implementing a Blended Learning Curriculum.” Riel et al. discuss the significance of both initial PD at the forefront of blended learning implementation and ongoing support for long-term fidelity of the approach.

Each of these articles investigates a different facet of professional development in K-12 online and blended learning environments, yet each one holds a significant purpose and recognition for deeper research in this field for continued growth and knowledge. We believe that the five articles included in this special issue are the catalysts to starting a trend for deeper research in teacher professional development for online and blended learning in the K-12 environment. Our hope is that this conversation is only just the beginning to a long, productive, and transformative movement that cultivates and promotes a positive reform in K-12 education.