

Distance Learning Course: Project Overview

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Learner Profile

The students in this distance-learning course are all K-12 educators. There is a running joke that teachers make the worst students, but what I find truer is that a student group made of teachers has a large variety of needs and interests. It is important to keep in mind when designing anything from professional development to a graduate level course for teachers that educators bring several things with them in to these spaces including: their own personal experiences and beliefs, the experiences and needs of their students, and the goals and expectations of their school community. The teacher learner is constantly looking for the application or the transfer context for the course content and may need a targeted approach to the orienting context. The course is designed for a cohort of up to 30 students and with the recognition that they will have different ages, backgrounds, and school contexts. Students may have found and enrolled in the course on their own or been registered by a supervisor or admin from their school.

Course Content

This course is designed to help teachers understand the ways in which their personal identities have developed over their lifetime, how those identities influence their approach to teaching and relationship building, and how intentional identity development can make them more empathetic and culturally responsive so that their classrooms become safer and more welcoming places for all students. The course is learner-focused though all learners share the same long-term objective of creating safe and welcoming spaces for all students to learn.

The course comprises of three units aligned to the three objectives already defined. Within each unit, learners engage with the lessons and content most applicable to their own

identity and experience. Unit 1 builds off the understanding learners may already have about identity, intersectionality, and interpersonal relationships. Unit 2 asks learners to apply that knowledge as they engage with several research-based opinion about what makes a strong competent educator. Unit 3 requires learners to develop their own vision for strong competent teaching given their own identity and content so that they can develop a plan of action and accountability as the final project for the course.

Design Model

The course combines the branch-designed instruction and hypercontent-designed instruction models for online learning. The branch-designed model is necessary for an effective course about identity development because the content will need to be differentiated. Some teachers may recognize a need to spend more time learning about how gender plays out in their classroom while others realize they have a real gap in awareness of ability/disability and may have barriers to learning in their classroom. The course allows teachers to self-select which identity modules to spend the most time with after completing the introductory module for each unit; the introductory modules contain basics everyone should know. Even within a module, learners will have the ability to determine their own sequencing of topics and interaction with the various media, which are key components of hypercontent-design. For example, male and female teachers may choose to engage with different learning objects within a gender in the classroom module.

Unit 1 Introductory Module

The first module of the entire course is the introductory module for Unit 1. This module is required to help introduce course content, introduce students to each other, invest learners in

the outcomes, define identity, and assess prior understanding of cultural competence. The main objectives for the three lessons within the module are:

1. Lesson 1 (Charting the Course): By the end of this lesson, students will be able to provide a coherent explanation of the course purpose, long-term outcomes, structure, and requirements in their own words. By the end of this lesson, students will determine at least three commitments for productive engagement in the course content and define the potential impact of each.
2. Lesson 2 (Key Terms & Concepts): By the end of this lesson, students will be able to compose a paper that defines all key terms and concepts for the course through specific classroom examples.
3. Lesson 3 (Story of Self): By the end of this lesson, students will be able to select the identity markers most important to them, demonstrate how those identities have been socialized and developed over time, and analyze how these select identities inform their approach to teaching and student relationships.

After completing this introductory module, students will have the knowledge and awareness to confidently create their learning pathway for the course.

References

Simonson, M., Smaldino, S., Zvacek, S. (2015). *Teaching and Learning at a Distance: Foundations of Distance Education. (6th ed)*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age.