



3.2 Teaching and Learning through e-Learning: A New Additional Qualification Course for the Teaching Profession

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Distance learning is about equity—it is imperative, expected and promotes province-wide accessibility to the courses.

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This paper will discuss the new additional qualification course guideline for *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* in Ontario. This innovative new teaching qualification course provides a foundation for teachers interested in supporting the development of professional knowledge, skills, dispositions and instructional practices that support teachers facilitating e-learning within various educational contexts across a highly diverse province.

Background

E-learning has been identified by both the Ontario teaching profession and the public as a significant and evolving area of professional knowledge for Ontario educators. E-learning provides additional flexibility in response to diverse learning needs, supports increased accessibility to learning opportunities and explores new forms of communication information technology in support of collaborative teaching and learning. E-learning has the potential to transform educational practices. Recommendations received from the profession and the public for increased information communication technology (ICT) education for teachers in the area of online learning precipitated the Ontario College of Teachers to introduce a new additional qualification course for teachers entitled *Teaching and Learning Through e-Learning*. This new teaching qualification supports public confidence and trust in educators' evolving pedagogical and instructional practices. It also reflects the rapidly changing advancements related to ICT and online trends within society and education.

Ontario Context

The Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), as the self-regulatory body for members of the teaching profession, has responsibilities related to additional qualifications. These responsibilities include the development and accreditation of programs leading to certificates of qualification that are additional to the certificate required for initial OCT membership. These additional professional learning and certification courses are available to the 235,000 members of the Ontario teaching profession. The courses are 125 hours in length. Successful completion of an additional qualification course is recorded on the member's Certificate of Qualification and Registration. The course expectations, content and learning experiences for *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* course are outlined in the additional qualification course policy guideline that was developed with input from the teaching profession, educational stakeholders and the public.

The OCT is committed to developing a new additional qualification (AQ) course related to Teaching and Learning Through e-Learning as a result of the review of O. Regulation 176/10, Teachers' Qualifications (Ontario College of Teachers, 2006). This regulation identifies the 370 additional qualification courses in English and the 370 additional qualification courses in French that are available for teachers in Ontario. New teacher education courses are added based upon identified needs by the teaching profession, educational policy and curriculum changes and the evolving nature of teaching and learning.

The teaching profession and the public strongly endorsed the importance of the establishment of a new additional qualification course that would help to enhance educators' abilities to support teaching and learning through online modes. In 2010, five additional qualification course providers implemented this new course across the province for the first time. One hundred and forty teachers have been awarded the new *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* additional qualification. This additional teacher education course is unique and distinctive. It is one-of-a-kind in Canada. As well, only three other jurisdictions in North America offer certification to teachers related to e-learning.

The new *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* qualification course guideline provides the conceptual framework for this course. The guideline identifies the core learning expectations and the essential content for supporting the professional knowledge and practices related to e-learning for teachers in Ontario. Course providers and instructors use the guideline to frame and guide their e-learning courses. Accreditation of this course is based upon the level of congruence of the course outlines with the provincial policy guideline.

A variety of research data-gathering activities were employed as part of the formal development process for this new policy guideline that directs the preparation and professional certification of teachers related to e-learning. These varied development processes for the e-learning AQ course guideline involved data collection from members of the educational community and the public. This input informed the identification of key course expectations and essential content for the new e-learning qualification guideline. The OCT acknowledges that practices related to e-learning continue to evolve and grow in response to the ever-changing Ontario educational and societal landscape. The e-learning guideline for *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* must continue to reflect these changes and advances. To support relevancy and currency of the course, it will be refined and updated through a formal seven-year AQ course review process.

Relevance for the Teaching Profession

E-learning is highly relevant and applicable to the current and future work of the Ontario College of Teachers. The College presently accredits fully online additional qualification courses. The College's regulatory objects related to standards and ongoing professional education align with and support the new "teaching e-learning" additional teacher qualification. This qualification is intended to enhance the professional knowledge and practices of educators involved in diverse modes of distance education.

Commencing in 2006, the Ontario Ministry of Education issued a policy document related to e-learning for all school boards in the province (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). The purpose of this policy is to meet the needs of a wide range of learners from diverse geographical regions of

the province by ensuring that e-learning was made available to all learners. To support the adoption and implementation of this policy, a range of professional learning webinars were offered by the Ministry to teachers from 2008 to 2012. The new *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* additional qualification course provides another level of support for the recent e-learning focus in school boards across the province.

The *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* additional qualification course is a timely and highly applicable professional education course for teachers. It helps to support the evolving need of members of the teaching profession to continue to refine their professional knowledge and skills in the application of ICT within online learning environments. It also communicates to the public the deep commitment of the teaching profession to continually engage in ongoing professional learning in response to student needs, learning styles and interests. Members of the teaching profession viewed the College's support and involvement in this initiative as extremely relevant to both individual educators and the collective teaching profession. This new additional qualification course serves the public interest and inspires public trust. The College's professional advisory on the *Use of Electronic Communication and Social Media* (Ontario College of Teachers, 2011) also highlights the importance of educators' evolving professional knowledge related to emergent social media technology, which will certainly influence e-learning strategies.

Provincial Writing Team

Educational partners with extensive knowledge and experience related to e-learning were invited to nominate a representative to participate in a provincial writing team responsible for the development of the content and learning expectations for the *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* additional qualification course guideline. The responsibility of this group of educators was to analyze the data collected from the field, along with reviewing relevant research regarding e-learning teaching qualifications. The writers brought a significant diversity of perspectives and experiences to the dialogic writing sessions. They participated in rich exchanges regarding the data gleaned from both the field and the public through consultations and discussions. These experienced and passionate expert e-learning educators were deeply committed to innovation, differentiated instruction and universal design. The professional responsibility that this group of educators embraced in developing the additional qualification course guideline related to *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* was a living example of self-regulation in action. The profession was entrusted to identify the necessary knowledge, skills and practices for professional certification in e-learning, which ultimately benefits learners within an ever-changing democratic society.

Course Overview

The additional qualification course *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* is open to all teachers. Candidates come to the *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* course with an interest or background in this area and a desire to extend and apply knowledge, skills and practices in the design, implementation, and assessment of e-learning programs.

Critical to the implementation of this course is the creation of positive learning experiences that reflect care, professional knowledge, ethical practice, leadership and ongoing learning. The Ontario College of Teachers recognizes that candidates working in the publicly funded school system,

independent/private institutions or First Nations Schools will have a need to explore, in an integrated delivery model, topics and issues of particular relevance to the context in which they work or may work. Key course expectations for the e-learning course provide a guide to inform the practices, learning experiences and leadership practices of course providers and instructors. Several of these course expectations include:

- Accessing and exploring a variety of resources, including technological resources, within and beyond the education system to enhance professional knowledge in support of student e-learning; and district school board policies and guidelines, particularly in the area of e-learning.
- Having and applying the theoretical understanding necessary to design, implement and assess e-learning programs and practices.
- Modeling and adapting expectations, strategies and assessment practices in response to the individual needs of students in the e-learning environment.
- Facilitating the creation of e-learning environments conducive to the intellectual, social, emotional, physical, linguistic, cultural, spiritual and moral development of the student.
- Accessing and exploring a variety of resources, including technological resources, within and beyond the educational system to enhance professional knowledge in support of student e-learning.
- Understanding how to create and sustain professional e-learning communities.

(Ontario College of Teachers, 2009, p. 3)

Theoretical Foundations for e-Learning

The theoretical foundations for the *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* course guidelines provide a common platform from which this teacher education course can be adapted to meet the individual interests, needs and contexts of educators enrolled in the course. The foundational theoretical underpinnings include:

- Understanding the context of the e-learner and relevant theories of e-learning.
- Exploring a variety of conceptual frameworks for e-learning both from a historical perspective and from an inquiry perspective.
- Exploring a variety of instructional processes to support online collaborative learning.
- Understanding the communication process in e-learning approaches.
- Using the Ministry curricula documents as the underpinnings of the e-learning approaches.
- Reflecting on personal teaching practices and engaging in professional dialogue on the relationships of theory and practice in the use of technology to foster e-learning.
- Having awareness of policy and/or legislation relevant to the *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* guideline.
- Knowing and understanding policies and procedures that are relevant to e-learning.
- Integrating the *Ethical Standards for the Teaching Profession* and the *Standards of Practice for the Teaching Profession* as the foundation for teacher professionalism within the additional qualification course, *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning*.

(Ontario College of Teachers, 2009, p. 5)

Course Content

The course content for *Teaching and Learning through e-Learning* includes five core and additional interrelated sections. These sections include:

- Program Planning
- Development and Implementation
- Pedagogical Principles
- Learners and Community
- Assessment and Evaluation
- Shared Support for Learners

The course content in the pedagogy section is designed to address unique pedagogical considerations and dimensions related to e-learning that educators need to reflect upon and integrate within their professional practices. These pedagogical elements include:

- Integrating information and communication technology to support student e-learning.
- Adapting, modifying and accommodating instruction to meet the needs of all e-learners.
- Creating, modifying, and maintaining e-learning resources, content, courses, and environments based on appropriate principles of instructional design.
- Applying appropriate methods, media and strategies based on principles of instructional design that support high levels of student engagement, achievement, and motivation.
- Developing strategies that enable teachers to provide effective tutoring, monitoring, supervision, feedback, support, facilitation and demonstrate social presence in e-learning environments.
- Developing an awareness of and strategies to resolve issues related to virtual classroom management including:
 - Flaming, cyber bullying
 - Plagiarism
 - Time management (attendance, pacing)
 - Content management (copyright)
 - Information management (privacy, grades, file storage)
- Demonstrating an awareness of existing electronic educational resources that support implementation of the Ontario curriculum by searching for, evaluating and integrating them into practice to support student learning.
- Building an awareness and the application of various educational technologies such as learning management system (LMS) software and web conferencing tools that support e-learning.
- Developing skills and competencies required to support learning in electronic environments.
- Employing a variety of instructional strategies to support e-learning environments.

(Ontario College of Teachers, 2009, p. 6–7)

The “Learners and Community” section of the course content identifies e-learning concepts that educators need to be cognizant of and need to consider when teaching learners through distance learning modes:

- understanding the social context of student learners (Net Generation) and their socialization in the 21st Century
- fostering a collaborative and interactive community of e-learners, teachers and supporters
- identifying factors that impact students in a diverse and changing society
- providing for differentiated instruction in the e-learning environment
- providing support for success based on the e-learner profile
- creating a learning environment that reflects effective e-learning practices that exemplify the ethical standards and the standards of practice.

(Ontario College of Teachers, 2009, p. 8)

The other three sections of the e-learning course content integrate to offer rich, dynamic and innovative learning environments for all e-learning candidates.

Final Reflections

Online learning within teacher education is a powerful inclusive tool for expanding learning opportunities and for fostering knowledge creation and mobilization. Supporting educators’ professional knowledge, skills and practices related to information computer technology through e-learning holds tremendous promise for re-shaping teacher education. When teacher education supports the practice of e-learning, which fosters equitable, accessible and inclusive learning communities, it has the remarkable power to transform society through supporting and embodying these principles as essential to living in an authentic, just and diverse community.

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