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# Examination of the QM Process: Making A Case for Transformative Professional Development Model

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## **Examination of the QM Process: Making a Case for Transformative Professional Development Model**

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Distance learning has altered the landscape of higher education, and the rapid proliferation of online courses and programs present new challenges for both faculty and administrators. The literature suggests that faculty must have a wide range of technical and pedagogical skills to be successful online teachers (Betts, 2009; Koehler, Mishra, & Yahya, 2007; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009). To ensure quality and consistency of online courses, many universities have adopted an industry-standard, quality assurance review framework. In this case, faculty members are required to attend a basic professional development seminar outlining the parts of the rubric and the submission and review process. The study attempts to answer the question: To what extent does the use of an industry-standard, quality assurance rubric for online course evaluation generate any noticeable transformation in the instructional practices of college faculty members? Using the theoretical lens of Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 1991), a qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009) was used to examine the Quality Matters™ reviews of 32 online courses. Findings show a high degree of consistency within the course designs, solid alignment between learning outcomes, assignments, and assessments, and standard elements within the course presentations. Using an industry-standard rubric is a good first step for faculty development, but it is not sufficient to produce significant and transformational changes in online teaching practices. The authors suggest a stronger focus on professional development that requires systematic reflection on the design, development, and delivery processes as a way to transform instructional practice.

**Keywords:** online learning, distance education, online faculty professional development, transformational learning theory, Quality Matters™, best practices in online teaching

## Introduction

The surge in availability of online degree programs and the dramatic increase in students enrolled in online programs are striking examples of the changes in higher education. Faculty are crucial to the design, development, and delivery of high quality online instruction (Wright, 2014). The role of faculty in the online environment assumes many forms: designer, role model, facilitator, and teacher. However, this wide range of roles requires faculty to transform their instructional practices, which is often challenging and difficult (Allen & Seaman, 2013). Not all college faculty members are equipped to handle the challenges of designing and delivering high quality online instruction (Koehler, Mishra, & Yahya, 2009). Thus, many universities have turned to an industry-standard, quality assurance instrument for the process monitoring of online course development.

The implementation of an industry-standard rubric to certify quality of an online course is a valuable metric (Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009). More importantly, the larger question needs to be asked: Does the use of a quality control tool produce better quality teaching in the online classroom? If a faculty member develops a course so that it meets the criteria of a standard rubric, does the use of such an instrument actually change the instructional practice of the teacher?

Fundamental to a student's online success is the challenge of enhancing the pedagogical and technical skills of the faculty member (Keengwe & Kidd, 2010). Just as the Internet has transformed the learning environment, so too, is the need for the transformation of faculty's repertoire of skills in curriculum development and instruction. McQuiggan (2012) suggests that, "... preparing to teach online presents an opportunity to rethink assumptions and beliefs about teaching" (p. 29). The adaptation of new teaching approaches becomes critical to ensure the learner's success. Online faculty professional development is vital to raise the quality of the student's learning experiences (Brooks & Gibson, 2012; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009). The premise is that professional development often misses the potential of its noble purpose (Wright, 2014). It is the position of the authors that professional development should transform the teaching practices of the faculty member, not merely assistance in the acquisition of new technical or instructional skills.

The increasing influence of online learning requires higher education to adapt (Hanna, 2007). Such adaptations include finding innovative ways to deliver instruction in the online course environment (Allen & Seaman, 2010). To implement these adaptive approaches, educational institutions have to re-assess their infrastructure, resources, and faculty capabilities. The study investigated whether the use of industry-standard, quality assurance rubric transforms the instructional practices of the participating faculty.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This section represents some literature on the primary factors and considerations needed to transform faculty practice online. Additionally, several faculty development models are presented and discussed as ways to improve online student learning. This is by no means a comprehensive review of the literature, but rather represents literature selected to frame and guide the discussion of faculty transformation regarding the purpose and directions of this research.

Consistent support for faculty development in online learning occupies a large space in the literature (Green, Alejandro, & Brown, 2009; Hixon, Buckenmeyer, Barczyk, & Feldman, 2011; Koehler, Mishra, & Yahya, 2007; Puzziferro & Shelton, 2009). In general, if institutions of higher education intend to have technology-enhanced learning experiences for their students, faculty must be trained in the knowledge and skills necessary to design and implement such experiences (Taylor & McQuiggan, 2008). Accordingly, designing faculty development becomes important to accommodate knowledge of content, pedagogy, and technology (Koehler, Mishra, & Yahya, 2007). The literature presents many instructional development models that could support development of faculty's ability to teach online effectively.

For example, the Online Human Touch (OHT) conceptual framework (Betts, 2009), developed at Drexel University, is focused on faculty engagement, and proactive actions to increase such engagement. The OHT framework was developed and used for faculty recruitment, training, mentoring, support, and professional development. Betts asserted that 1) the stronger the connection of faculty members to their program, functional unit, and campus, the more likely they will continue their involvement and enthusiasm for online teaching; and 2) faculty members will become more effective in the online classroom because they would invest the time in finding innovative ways to teach and engage the participating learners.

Puzziferro and Shelton (2009) suggest a team-based, systems approach that focused on an online instructional design theory called *Active Mastery*

*Learning.* The goal is to develop robust and effective online courses, and this model would help institutions adopt a process of documenting course development. The validity of the model should evolve and be modified based on faculty satisfaction, quality of design, and student learning outcomes.

Koehler, Mishra, and Yahya (2007) present a powerful conceptual framework to express the importance of the intersection of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge (TPCK). They generated the framework based on the collaboration of faculty and master's degree students developing online courses. TPCK emphasizes the importance and complexities of relationships and intersections among content, pedagogy, technology, and their respective contexts. Koehler, Mishra, and Yahya believed that their framework could function as a model to integrate research, pedagogy and theory as it stimulates the focus on rational and detailed understanding of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge. More importantly, TPCK highlights the complexities, cross-sections, and tensions that faculty members experience teaching online.

Smith (2005) conducted a meta-analysis to compile a list of fifty-one competencies that an online instructor should possess to be able to provide a quality distance education experience. These competencies were sorted into a model that used three different classifications: (1) competencies needed prior to start of a course; (2) competencies needed during the course; and (3) competencies needed after the course. He warned that traditional face-to-face techniques may not be should not be effective in the online classroom. Smith's work suggests that faculty members should be assisted in transitioning to the online environment, trained and mentored, and provided with resources. Thus, Smith makes a clarion call for transformational professional development.

De Rijdt, Stes, van der Vleuten, and Dochy (2013) acknowledge the positive influence of professional development on student learning. However, De Rijdt et al. discerned that the situation, context, and environment influence the transformational effects of the professional development. The issues surrounding professional development are complex and need to be adjusted based on what works for which faculty and under what conditions. Ultimately, the professional development process should be differentiated for the individual faculty based on their learning needs and the situational context. Furthermore, Ebert-May, Derting, Hodder, Momsen, Long, and Jardeleza (2011) conducted a study to assess the effect of a professional development workshop on teaching practices in undergraduate education. They observed that results differed for participating faculty. They also

shared that self-reported survey data indicated that, “significant gains in faculty knowledge of and firsthand experience with specific aspects of reformed teaching...” (Ebert-May et al., 2011, p. 554).

Finally, Mandernach, Donnelly, Dailey, and Schulte (2005) presented a faculty evaluation model for online instructors. The rationale behind their model is that an evaluation system that is specific for online instructors has the potential to improve their instructional approaches and increase the usefulness of the students’ experience. Mandernach et al. explained that the model held two purposes: mentoring and evaluation with formative and summative phases. The formative phase included five reviews that guide the instructor through planning, designing, and teaching the course. The summative phase, conducted at the conclusion of the course, was a reflective look to help the instructors and their departments enhance courses by implementing suggested changes given during the formative reviews. To complete the different types of evaluations, the model shared artifacts including review forms to help with the different phases. The overarching purpose of this model is to facilitate faculty transformation as online instructors.

The literature presented provides clear evidence that systematic reflection is fundamental to transforming instructional practice of online teachers. Additionally, professional development that implements many of the suggestions from the literature will spur and enhance the skills and knowledge base to support the transformation of many online faculty.

## **BACKGROUND AND RESEARCH QUESTION**

As previously discussed, distance learning has altered the landscape of higher education, and the rapid proliferation of online courses and programs present new challenges for both faculty and administrators. The literature presented suggests that faculty need to have a wide range of technical and pedagogical skills to be successful online teachers. To ensure quality and consistency of the online courses, many universities have adopted an industry-standard, quality assurance review process for the development of online courses. At a large suburban university in the southeastern United States, the Quality Matters™ (QM) framework is used to certify online courses before delivery to the students.

Quality Matters™ is one of the premier faculty-centered evaluation programs for assuring consistency in the design of online courses. Many universities and institutions benchmark the design, development, and maintenance of their online courses with this subscription-based framework. The

framework was established in 2003 by a consortium of online educators, MarylandOnline. The research-based rubric consists of eight general standards: (1) course overview and introduction, (2) learning objectives (competencies), (3) assessment and measurement, (4) instructional materials, (5) course activities and learner engagement, (6) course technology, (7) learner support, and (8) accessibility and usability.

The eight general standards constitute 41 specific items for review on the Fourth Edition of the rubric. Each of the 41 items can be scored with *one, two, or three* points. Fundamental to the principles of QM is the need for alignment across these eight areas, especially in regards to the learning objectives, assessments, and course activities. Best practice in instructional design, as well as good teaching, requires the alignment of learner outcomes, assessments, and instructional strategies. A maximum point value for all standards is 95, and a passing score of 81 is required to meet the QM certification.

Certification of an online course assures a certain level of consistency between the course structure, learner outcomes, and assessments. To begin the QM review process, faculty members are required to attend a basic professional development seminar outlining the parts of the rubric and the submission and review process. However, does this professional development session transform their instructional practices? Will the use of the QM rubric broaden the horizon for traditional classroom faculty with respect to course design, learner engagement and feedback, facilitation and communication, and participating and contributing to teaching faculty communities?

This study was designed to assess the influence of using an industry-standard rubric as an agent of change with respect to the faculty development in online teaching. Considering that the courses that undergo the certification review are evaluated using one rubric, it is logical to expect similar outcomes from the faculty development. Therefore, the study was conducted to answer the question: *To what extent does the use of an industry-standard, quality assurance rubric for online course evaluation generate any noticeable transformation in the instructional practices of college faculty members?*

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical lens for this study is Transformative Learning Theory (TLT) (Mezirow, 1991). Essential to TLT is an initial professional development experience, coupled with reflective thought about the experience, and

finally rational discourse about the process. This framework is well suited for adult learners and this research study. Adults make meaning of their experiences by becoming aware of the dynamics of the learning process, in this case, aspects of the QM rubric. The most important aspect in TLT is the reflective examination of the process and preconceived assumptions about the experience. This reflective process is the key to generating meaning from the learning experience.

Mezirow (1991) extended a model to explain the nature of adult learning with Transformative Learning Theory (TLT). The foundations of TLT are grounded in the theoretical underpinnings of frame of reference, meaning perspective, habit of mind, disorienting dilemma, critical self-reflection, domains of learning, and meaning schemes (Kitchenham, 2008). An influential work related to TLT is that of Habermas (1971), who presented three domains of learning: (a) the technical, (b) the practical, and (c) the emancipatory. The first includes learning just to complete a task; the second is learning specific to the environment; and the third is the deepest, as it taps the human psyche. Speaking to this last domain, McQuiggan (2012) affirms that the TLT uses a constructivist approach for adult development and combines principles from education, psychology, sociology, and philosophy. The constructivist aspect of the TLT suggests that humans construct meaning from their experiences to create individual transformation (Cranton & Wright, 2008).

Furthermore, Mezirow (1991) suggests four ways of learning: learning new meaning schemes, elaborating on those schemes, transforming meaning schemes, and producing meaning perspectives. Depended on the learner's assumptions and expectations, the *meaning perspective* is a space where a learner makes meaning out of a learning experience (Malkki, 2010). Malkki (2010) concludes that, "reflection refers to becoming aware of and assessing the taken-for-granted assumptions within one's meaning perspective, in order to construct a more valid belief..." (p. 47). This conclusion suggests that reflection has self-oriented meaning; multiple learners in the same learning experience will have different reflections, and hence, different meanings.

Snyder (2008) explored the TLT-centered literature for the purpose of understanding as a gauge for learner-transformation. Her study addressed the fact that measuring transformation was difficult due to capturing and analyzing self-reported data. That difficulty, in turn, suggested a need for a reflective learning framework with multiple data pathways.

Ideally, faculty members are transforming when they use the QM rubric



for online course design and development. Thus, Transformative Learning Theory is the rational theoretical foundation and lens for this research study.

## METHODOLOGY

At a large, suburban university in the southeastern United States, a qualitative document analysis (Bowen, 2009) was used to examine the Quality Matters™ reviews of 32 online courses. Using the theoretical lens of TLT (Mezirow, 1991), course reviews were examined to find patterns of transformative instructional practices. Additionally, descriptive statistics were generated on the course reviews to aid in the identification of patterns and themes.

### Data Source

The data set for this study was 32 Quality Matters™ course reviews that included eight graduate and 24 undergraduate online courses. The content of these courses varied from business, education, and social science disciplines. All online courses were required to meet QM certification before becoming an official university offering. Courses reviewed before August 2011 needed 72 points out of 85 to be accredited. In July 2011, the QM certification rubric changed with the addition of several items. That affected the total number of points possible and the passing cut score. After that date, a course needed 81 points out of 95 to pass the review successfully. The table below shows course pseudonym names, date of review, review status, and scores. The pseudonyms comply with the Institutional Review Board requirements.

**Table 1**  
Online Courses Reviewed

Course	Date Ended	Review Status	Score
C001	04/16/2012	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	95
C002	07/04/2012	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	93
C003	05/23/2012	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	93
C004	04/01/2014	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	95
C005	02/17/2011	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	83
C006	04/29/2014	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	88
C007	03/18/2012	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	95
C008	09/27/2011	Met Standards – Upon Amendment	62, 95

C008	07/31/2014	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	94
C010	06/20/2013	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	95
C011	07/26/2012	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	93
C012	06/21/2012	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	93
C013	08/06/2013	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	95
C014	07/12/2011	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	85
C015	11/13/2012	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	95
C016	11/11/2013	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	93
C017	04/04/2012	Met Standards – Upon Amendment	82, 95
C018	10/22/2013	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	93
C019	08/27/2012	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	89
C020	10/29/2012	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	93
C021	02/11/2013	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	95
C022	08/27/2013	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	95
C023	03/25/2014	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	94
C024	05/23/2011	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	85
C025	01/16/2014	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	93
C026	11/05/2013	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	95
C027	06/24/2013	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	95
C028	12/02/2013	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	95
C029	02/26/2014	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	92
C030	01/22/2014	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	93
C031	05/09/2013	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	93
C032	07/01/2014	Met Standards – 1 <sup>st</sup> Review	93

## Data Analysis

The Quality Matters™ reviews of these 32 courses were examined using the document analysis methodology (Bowen, 2009). The qualitative data was analyzed to identify factors prevalent in the online course reviews. The first step in this process was the identification of patterns, themes, and links within the data. The pattern analysis and node structure evolved and surfaced during the data analysis phase. The method for the data analysis first

included the identification of the tree and free nodes. A spiral method of analysis was used to reduce the nodes to themes, and then group the themes that informed the findings (Creswell, 2008; Marshall & Rossman, 2010).

## FINDINGS

### The Course Reviews Return a Strong Level of Consistency

The data presented a high level of constancy and compliance to the Quality Matters™ rubric framework. The QM rubric particularly focused on the alignment of four major standards: Standard 2 - Learning objectives, Standard 3 - Assessments and measurements, Standard 4 - Instructional materials, and Standard 5 - Course activities and learner engagement. The examination of the 32 course reviews showed a 100% pass rate with very little variability or dispersion in the final scores ( $M = 92.75$ ,  $SD = 3.22$ ). In Table 1 above, only two courses did not pass certification on the first attempt and required revisions. The designers were provided an opportunity to revise and resubmit specific items of the course. After the revisions, both courses passed with a very high score of 95.

The course reviews demonstrated a tight alignment of the QM standards; however, because the rubric predominantly uses a *yes* or *no* grading approach or a *one*, *two*, or *three* value, it is hard to determine the level of quality embedded in the instructional activities and pedagogy involved. Nonetheless, the data presents a solid level of internal consistency in the rubric items. Overall, the QM rubric results in courses with well aligned objectives, instructional activities and materials, and the assessments used in the course, which is the purpose and goal of the evaluation framework.

#### Logistical Issues in the Courses

One of the strongest themes uncovered from the data analysis was the power of QM to identify logistical errors. Courses evolve over time, and content or assignments may come from multiple authors. The course reviewers identified potential points of confusion and frustration for the students, for example, misaligned point values, missing gradebook items, invalid URLs, or missing discussion boards. An example is reflected in this reviewer's comment: "The Start Here presentation asked the students to introduce themselves to others on the discussion board but there was no discussion area provided" (C018, p. 2). The majority of reviewers' comments dealt with mechanical and logistical items used to improve the course. Another reviewer commented, "[in] the first assignment she does not provide the same detailing directions as the latter two, students could end up confused.

Consider modeling the first rubric after the other two in order to be consistent and clear” (C006, p.6). Ultimately, these simple checks for alignment and consistency improve the course and helps the students, but present little evidence of transformative instructional practice based on the use of the rubric.

### **Problems with Objectives**

Two issues that surfaced in the data analysis reflected some evidence of pedagogical transformation centered on the construction and use of objectives. The first issue dealt with the proper construction of measurable objectives. Several course designers included nebulous objectives like, “the student will know” and “the student will understand.” Moreover, the data suggests the need for “specific, observable, and measurable terms such as demonstrate, evaluate, explain, describe, and discuss” (C023, p. 3). The majority of faculty designers understand the need for concrete learning outcomes and received high marks on this particular rubric item. Nonetheless, several comments suggested a need for greater attention to the construction of measurable objectives.

The second major theme that emerged from the data regarding the alignment of institutionally mandated course objectives, which are often times goal statements and not objectives. Curriculum committees or other third parties may have authored the original course purpose, scope, and sequence. The individual course designer may not have the authority to change the stated purpose or overarching objectives. One reviewer identified this problem with this comment, “the course objectives are listed in the syllabus and institutionally mandated. Though I found the language not measurable . . . they are institutionally mandated, so not adjustable by this instructor” (C006, p. 12). Being constrained by an existing set of course objectives or learning outcomes presents challenges in the design process, and may produce more dissonance in the course. The misalignment of course objectives and learning outcomes with institutionally set course objectives or goal statements is an interesting theme that emerged from this data.

### **A Wide Variety of User Interface Design**

The reviews contained a number of comments regarding the type and quality of the screen layouts and user interface. There were many similarities, and naturally, differences. Two courses stood out: One instructor orga-

nized the course and placed the numbers of the rubric standards next to the content items to show how the course met QM compliance. While another instructor, in contrast, used a more primitive approach to the user interface; he/she included all of the items in a PDF document. Another set of courses used a similar interface with the same elements, but their instructors customized the backgrounds and colors. These similar interfaces could indicate design standards within a college or program, the sharing of standard content, or the influence of an instructional designer. In comparison, there was a group of courses from one discipline. One instructor submitted two courses with different page layouts and organizational structures. All the courses from the same content area had different layouts. The purpose of QM is to ensure consistency in the content and user interface. Regardless of the course content or level (graduate or undergraduate), no two courses were identical in their design or user-interface; nonetheless, the majority of scores were very high.

### **Student Progress Monitoring and Self-Assessments**

One of the rubric items requires the designer to provide students with opportunities to track their learning progress. The analysis showed a wide variation in the methods used to address this standard. The most prominent method was the use of the grade book in the learning management system. Because scores were recorded in the gradebook, the students had the opportunity to monitor their progress in the course. Although the gradebook is a logical tool for helping students track their progress, several interesting variations were observed as samples of best practice. For example, several courses used ungraded, self-assessment quizzes at the end of each module. This approach removed some of the stress associated with the grades and shifted the focus on to self-regulated learning (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2001). Another approach discovered in the analysis was the use of checklists at the beginning or end of each module. Several instructors presented the checklist as an introduction to the module and as way for students to monitor their own progress through the instructional tasks and requirements. One reviewer commented, "At the start of each module, we get a list of objectives, as well as a checklist of what activities are due when. This checklist is useful for navigating the assignments and the directions are thorough" (C006, p. 4). Both the use of the ungraded quizzes and the instructional checklist are distinctive and appropriate methods to facilitate students' progress monitoring.

The findings shared in this section provided a look into the different

themes found in the review documents of 32 courses that underwent QM rubric standards. The next will elaborate on what these findings conveyed toward the goal of answering the research question.

## DISCUSSION

Overall, the data presented solid evidence of the positive effects of using the QM rubric. It reveals several themes and best practices that facilitate student learning in the online environment. Very little evidence was found in the course reviews regarding instructional practice or changes in online pedagogy. That is not to say that transformation did not occur; however, the course reviews did not provide evidence of transformative instructional practices.

Collectively, the themes identified in the findings are consistent with best practices in online education. The courses in this sample of reviews met the rubric standards at a very high level. The literature, discussed earlier, suggests that faculty need to have a wide range of technical and pedagogical skills to be successful online teachers. The reviews demonstrated technical, organizational, and logistical skills needed for a successful course design. But where is the enhanced pedagogical content knowledge? (Koehler, Mishra, & Yahya, 2007).

Faculty have a significant amount of academic freedom in addressing the QM standards as evidence with the wide interpretation of user interfaces. The literature provides some explanations for the differences found in the data analysis such as the faculty member's commitment (De Gagne & McGill, 2010), teaching experience (Ebert-May et. al., 2011), lack of mentoring (Vaill & Testori, 2012), and personal, institutional, and technical factors (Kampov-Polevoi, 2010).

In conclusion, the analysis of the course reviews did not provide evidence of shifts in instruction or pedagogy. Perhaps this is the nature of the QM rubric with a focus on procedural and logistical issues instead of pedagogical methodology. If this is the case, the authors call for a different type of professional development that focuses on systematic reflection on the experience (Mezirow, 1991) of the process of course development and delivery.

## LIMITATIONS

All research has inherent limitations (Russell & Purcell, 2009), and it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. Due to resources and privacy concerns, the authors made conscious decisions to limit the scope and size of data set. Naturally, one of the major limitations is the small sample size from one institution. A fundamental component of the theoretical framework is the evolving nature of learning based on experience and reflections. This research is a snapshot in time with no follow-up with the course designers regarding their evolution, transformation, or changes in the structure and pedagogy.

Additionally, the data set was restricted to the course designer and the reviewer. No input was provided about the structure or quality of the course from the most important constituents, the students. A lack of student input and feedback is a major limitation of the study.

The proprietary nature of Quality Matters™ presented unique challenges in regards to security and confidentiality of the courses and the reviews. Working with a proprietary, fee-based tool presented serious restrictions disclosing the nature of the evaluation process and the rubric. Finally, a last major limitation was the lack of access to the actual courses and the content. To maintain the confidentiality, all identifiable variables was scrubbed from the course reviews to maintain anonymity and security in compliance with the Institutional Review Board.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

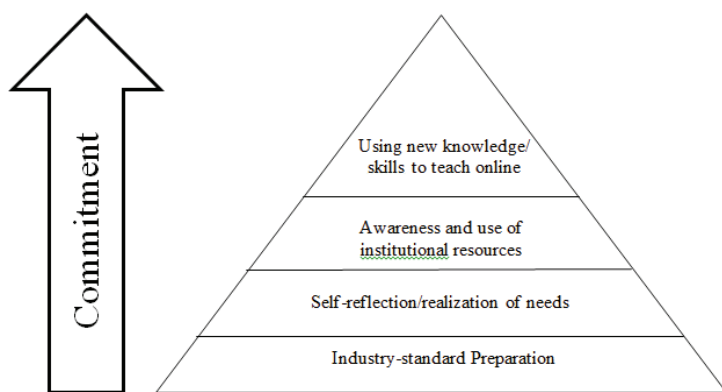
The authors take the position that using an industry-standard rubric is a good first step for faculty development, but it is not sufficient to produce significant changes in teaching practices due to the lack of reflection opportunity. One expects faculty development to be a change agent that improves faculty performance in the online classroom. Hence, the approach should be a comprehensive process that includes orientation and initial training activities, mentorship, and continuous support (Vaill & Testori, 2012). Furthermore, professional development should be a shared responsibility among all stakeholders (De Gagne & McGill, 2010). Using the theoretical lens of Transformative Learning Theory and the findings of this study, the authors posit that online faculty development is a serious learning experience that ideally results in transformation and improvements in instructional approaches.

Accordingly, an institution that commits to using the QM rubric, or any other industry standard, should optimize the potential to develop faculty's online teaching effectiveness by providing a systematic opportunity for reflection on that learning experience. McQuiggan (2012) concludes that most models used for faculty development have a singular approach without an opportunity for reflection. These models reflect a disconnection between the traditional classroom and the online classroom. Successful faculty development initiatives are closely associated with regular self-reflection for their participants (Reilly, Vandenhouten, Gallagher-Lepak, & Ralston-Berg, 2012).

Of equal importance, the institution should design a professional development sequence to support participating online faculty beyond course development and review. It would be helpful for such a model to imbed vehicle for sharing faculty perspectives as they progress. The goal of this dissemination will be to facilitate transformation in professional practice. These efforts can produce a structured support system that includes the following personnel:

- The instructor of the course;
- An instructional designer, and
- A peer-mentor or a faculty learning community.

The success of the support structure will heavily depend on the commitment from interested faculty and their administrators. A vision for such a model is presented in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Online Faculty Development Model.

The bottom layer in the instructor-oriented pyramid denotes a process similar to the QM rubric training with single or multiple episodes. The as-



sumption is that many institutions of higher education have used this or similar regulated approaches (Herman, 2012).

In the second layer, it is important for an instructor who chooses to participate in online teaching preparation to reflect on the experience (McLawhon & Cutright, 2012). Such reflection can help the instructor in assessing their new knowledge, and becoming aware of needs (Reilly et al., 2012). These needs may include learning about institutional support, peer support, and technical support (Ragan, Bigatel, Kennan, & Dillon, 2012). Examples of institutional resources include instructional designers and peer mentors. It is considered helpful for an instructor who decides to teach online to invest time with an instructional designer as well as seek peer-mentorship (Lackey, 2011). With the help of institutional support and diligence (Kampov-Polevoi, 2010), faculty members can become effective in the online environment.

The external piece of the model indicates shared commitment from the instructor (De Gange & McGill, 2011) and the institution alike. Faculty development requires all stakeholders to embrace the same objective. Supporting institutional resources and an instructor's knowledge and skill play major role in successful online faculty preparation (Lloyd, Byrne, & McCoy, 2012).

## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The premise of this study was to examine the influence of using an industry-standard rubric for online faculty development. The use of industry-based rubric or template can play a role in setting a baseline for faculty inexperienced in online instruction with respect to course design, learner engagement and feedback, facilitation and communication, and participation and contributing to teaching faculty communities. Study findings show a high degree of consistency within the course designs, solid alignment between learning outcomes, assignments, and assessments, and standard elements within the course presentations. Additionally, the findings show that using such a rubric alone does not necessarily produce teaching improvements. Using the theoretical lens of Transformative Learning Theory it was argued that the current QM rubric used in this particular context did not show transformation in some instructors' approach to course design. The authors attributed the lack of transformation to an absence of reflection, an important principle of Mezirow's theory.

This study raises several important questions that align with the central research premise. For example, faculty are required to take a basic profes-

sional development workshop before beginning the QM evaluation process, but what value is each instructor getting from the online-readiness training? Is transformational learning taking place? Do the instructors reflect on the experience to show pedagogical transformation? What is the evidence of transformation and how do you assess that transformation? Further investigation is needed to address these questions, and it is important to look at other data sources including interviewing faculty and students, as well as, more detailed monitoring of the professional development process. Eventually, another research avenue is the documentation of the transformation process.

This study opens many future opportunities to explore longitudinal impact of the QM training on participating faculty. For example, a follow-up study would entail interviewing the faculty designers to explore pedagogical change based on QM process. A more involved study may seek to modify the industry-standard rubric to add systematic reflective elements.

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