A Study on Web-Based Continuing Professional Development Program for Teachers: A School-Based Approach

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Abstract
The purposes of this study were to design a web-based continuing professional development program (CPD) for special educators and to evaluate it effectiveness. School’s faculties instead of programmers developed the CPD program. 17 teachers participated the program and completed the requested tasks finally. These results indicated that this CPD program was effective, usable and feasible based on the interview with these teachers.

1. Introduction

Web-based distance learning, especially asynchronous learning, developed rapidly in the past few years. Lots of researchers were engaged in the related studies, including system development and pedagogy integration. The asynchronous distance learning web sites have mushroomed and played more important role in continuing education recently. But these systems, running in the universities or profit/nonprofit organizations, may not be suited to the teachers in schools from the opinion of school-based professional development because of those programs focused on the individuals' interesting and the important issues about education instead of the specific needs of the development for individual school.

In order to provide the opportunities of CPD for the teachers and improve the school’s accountability, the school, Chiayi School for mentally retarded in Taiwan, conducted various CPD programs based on the school-based approach, including lecture, workshop, studying group, and even action research. But it is difficult to arrange the CPD programs based on the teacher’s various needs and schedules.

Since the web-based asynchronous learning has its strength of learning anytime anywhere, it could be a practicable solution for the school to provide the teachers with more flexible CPD programs that could meet the needs of the school and the teachers simultaneously, if it takes school-based approach to develop the online CPD programs. In order to investigate the possibility of providing school-based online CPD programs in the school, the purposes of this study were to set up a web-based CPD program and to evaluate its effectiveness.

2. Methodology

Researchers adopted the participant mode of action research method, because this study aimed to solve an actual problem in the school field instead of to explore the theoretical issues [¹]. At the beginning, researchers organized a research group that involved the faculties of the school and the researchers to discuss the topic of the CPD program and to develop the web site. Then, the
research group conducted the questionnaire survey to explore the teachers’ attitude toward the web-based continuing professional development mode before carrying out the CPD program. The researchers interviewed with the participant teachers to examine the effectiveness of this program after the Web-based CPD program executed.

3. Description of the CPD program

Based on the needs of school development, the research group decided to choose “individualized education program, IEP” (an important document that must be developed for the students with disabilities as a basis to provide special education and related services required by law) as the topic of this CPD program after discussed. This program focused on the IEP reflection and evaluation for they have experienced with the IEP development.

The teachers used the Macromedia’s Dreamweaver 4.0 to create the web pages, and adopted the Active Server Page technique to design the login and discussion board. Since the program was developed on project-based, the major functions of this web included document reading, project interpretation, discussion board, and project upload.

Besides to reading the information on the web, learners were ask to accomplish some projects related to IEP development, reflection and evaluation, such as using IEP checklist to evaluated the quality of the IEP, operating the IEP development software to examine the usability of these programs.

4. Results and conclusions

4.1. Attitude toward the web-Based CPD

Fifty teachers of this school returned the questionnaires back; most of them had the basic capability about using information technology and heard of the web-based learning before.

Most of all these 50 teachers did think that it is a feasible, flexible and quality way to provide CPD program by means of web-based mode (94% to 98%), for example, teachers very agreed or agreed that they could participate the CPD programs based on their interesting (94%) or from different living location (96%) if they were carried out in web-based mode. Besides, they recognized that they should be more active and interact with others instead of reading the document on the web only (96%), and expressed their strong will to participate the web-based CPD programs (94%).

4.2. Effectiveness of the CPD program

Seventeen teachers participated in this web-based CPD program and accomplished the assigned project finally. According to the results of the interview, researchers found that all the participants thought that they learned more on the web by means of accomplishing the assigned projects and discussing with others, comparing to the traditional CPD program, and indicated that it was flexible to study based on individual schedule. They also pointed out that the structure of the web was simple and the interface was user-friendly thought it was designed by the faculties.

5. Reference