PODCAST TRANSCRIPT
EDG 6931: Distance Education Leadership and Management

Interviewee: Dr. Marty Beech, Project Director
Interviewer: Pam Connolly
Date: March, 31, 2010

PC: Hi and Welcome!

SLIDE 1
PC: My name is Pam Connolly and I am currently a student of Distance Learning through the University of Florida.

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PC: I am here today at the Learning Systems Institute located on the campus of Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida and I’ll be speaking today with Dr. Marty Beech about her experiences in the field of Distance Education and e-learning.

PC: Before we begin with questions, let me share with you that the Learning Systems Institute is a multidisciplinary organization dedicated to bridging the gap between research and practice in education and training.

SLIDE 3
PC: Dr. Beech serves in a number of roles here at the institute. First and foremost she is the Co-Principal Investigator and Project Director of the Accommodations and Modifications Project for Students with Disabilities through the Florida Department of Education. She also serves as Lead Investigator for technical assistance for the Florida Center of Research in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics and she is the Co-Principal Investigator for the Florida Inclusion Network Administrator; all of this in addition to managing a variety of FSU Regional Projects.
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**PC:** Through her work in each of these areas, Dr. Beech became an early crusader in the development of distance learning options as a means of getting key information into the hands of educators working with students with disabilities. Dr Beech, thank you so very much for joining us today.

**Dr. Beech:** You are very welcome.

**PC:** Are you ready for a few questions?

**Dr. Beech:** I am

**PC:** Well, let’s get started.

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**PC: QUESTION 1:** Let’s think about this, could you briefly describe some of the distance learning projects in which you have been involved.

**Dr. Beech:** Sure. My first experience in distance learning was developing a graduate level curriculum course for the Department of Education in Leadership here at Florida State University and I taught the course to a cadre of teachers in Monroe County who were training to become principals. Shortly after that I, through some funding through the Florida Department of Education, I was asked to develop two online courses for Content Enhancement Routines. These are teaching tools for secondary level teachers and I contracted with an expert from the University of Kansas Research on Learning where these routines had been developed to create the content for that course. At present I’m working with my colleagues here at the Learning Systems Institute to develop a variety of self paced online courses that are more introductory in nature. We are developing courses in access points for students with significant cognitive disabilities, physical education and health education, grading policies and accommodations.

**PC:** Well it certainly sounds like you started at that ground up level; let me teach this first. Let me get that experience and that vantage point before moving on into the development and implementation phase. It sounds like that is probably experience that will serve you well. Let’s shift to another idea.
PC: QUESTION 2: I know that you have long been a leader in training and product development for in-service educators in the State of Florida. How have you gone about making the transition from hands on, face to face learning style and involvement to sharing your research and work through the virtual world?

Dr. Beech: Well, I think it was the hard way. We were asked to assist one of the FDLRS centers in Broward County to translate one of the very successful face to face workshops called Dealing with Differences into an online course. I worked with Roz Pullen to make that transition. What we were trying to do was to take the power-point, notes and speakers’ activities and just make them online. We both found that didn’t work. The types of interactive activities that were incorporated into the face to face workshop didn’t make an easy transition to online so we abandoned that project because we were just not happy with the results.

PC: Well it certainly sounds like, well, I don’t know about you, but, I know for myself that learning the hard way that at least those lessons stick and I know what not to do again in the future. Let’s think about something else here. Having realized that you couldn’t just automatically make this roll over to the virtual world,

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PC QUESTION 3: As you developed programs in e-learning, what were the primary quality factors that you and your development team established as benchmarks for success?

Dr. Beech: Well the first set of standards we employ is the standards for the Florida Staff Development Protocol. These are used all over the state to guide the implementation of professional development including needs assessment and knowledge provision and follow up activities. So we’ve tried to make sure that we address all of the required standards. We also wanted to be sure to include the accurate information at a level that once teachers learned that information they would be able to implement the routines with fidelity so that was very important for us.

PC: O.K. So, as you went about establishing these primary quality factors and benchmarks and you combined that with what you learned not to do through Dealing with Differences,
PC QUESTION 4: Did you find any other considerations that differed from the programs you have previously developed for face-to-face professional development programs?

Dr. Beech: I would say that we are finding that online information needs to be more explicit and easier to follow than you can use with face to face. With face to face you have the opportunity to explain yourself and answer questions. In online you do not so you want to make sure that the visual layout and the navigation and the information is provided with the optimum clarity.

PC: Well, certainly based on what I have been studying and reading and learning from my colleagues as we engage in online forums, what you have learned from experience is validated in the literature. Let’s think now about evaluation. And sometimes, as you will notice by the gentleman in the lower left hand corner, evaluation can be a frustrating process.

PC QUESTION 5: But, I’d like to know a little bit about the evaluation process you and your team put together to look at both the qualitative and quantitative elements.

Dr. Beech: With the Content Enhancement Routines courses we have a very robust set of evaluation measures incorporated in it. We use the Change Based Adoption Model by Hall and Hord called C-B and we implement a ‘Stages of Concern’ questionnaire at both the beginning of the course and the end of the course to consider whether or not the participants have shifted in their concerns. We use a ‘Level of Use’ interview at the end of the course to find out whether they are actually using the routines. We have also incorporated some self evaluative checklists and use reflection tools. We have a satisfaction survey that the teachers fill out and their students fill out. Most importantly we require teachers to capture student outcome data. They can use whatever instruments or assessments they are currently using in their classrooms. We ask them to look at it at several stages during their implementation to see what changes or effect it has on their student performance.

PC: Certainly what I am hearing from what you just described is that one size does not fit all and to determine the effectiveness of a program you need multiple measures of success, ongoing measures of success and especially in what we do in working with in-
service educators feedback that says are we making a difference in the learning of kids. That’s quite a comprehensive program.

**Dr. Beech:** Yes

**PC:** So now, let’s think of about this, how’s this working for you?

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**PC QUESTION 6:** What are the results telling you today about the effectiveness of the distance learning programs you have developed?

**Dr. Beech:** Well over the past 4 or 5 years where we’ve had the Content Enhancement Routine in place in Florida, we find that the teachers who go through the entire course and gather their student data and submit all the requirements are very effective in their results. We are seeing the same type of student performance bump that the original research showed which is a good 10-20 percentile points on classroom assessments.

**PC:** And that’s always a good thing.

**Dr. Beech:** That’s a very good thing. And that’s the good news. The bad news is that we find a pretty high attrition rate given that our course is very comprehensive. It requires implementation on at least two occasions, and the collection of data. Teachers will start the course and realize I’m going to have to do quite a bit of work to get the 30 points that I’m working towards and they drop out. So, I would say on average we have about a 50% attrition rate.

**PC:** And that sounds pretty consistent with both what I’m seeing in the literature and as well as what I’ve experienced with the staff with which I work in some of our online efforts. Now, I’m guessing Dr. Beech that a lot has changed since your trial and effort start from 5 or 6 years ago for where you turn for learning. As you think about what it is that you need to grow and improve in this field,

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**PC QUESTION 7:** What resources do you turn to in order to support you as a leader in distance learning?

**Dr. Beech:** Well I’m very fortunate that here at Learning Systems Institute we have experts in the development of online learning who work in other industries including the US Army to develop online courses for them so I turn to them when I am stuck on a design or something like that. I also turn to my colleagues throughout the State of
Florida. I was also involved in the development of content for one of the Professional Development Alternative ESE classes early on and I still collaborate with Mary Ann Ahearn and Susan O’Rear to get what they know about presenting courses. I look to my colleagues and then I look across the state.

**PC:** You are right we really are fortunate in the State of Florida to have some real leaders in this field of distance learning. It just so happens I’ll be interviewing Mary Ann Ahearn next week for another aspect on this course.

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**PC QUESTION 8:** Finally, before we close, do you have any words of advice or direction for those of us who are in the exploratory and development phase of our skill-career building in distance education?

**Dr. Beech:** Well I find that I’ve become more reasonable about my expectations for learners the more courses I develop. Early on the very first course I developed I had more links than anybody could ever possibly use and the students told me about that so I’ve tried to be…to develop the course from their point of view and their eyes and reasonableness is kind of one of my guiding phrases. And I also have found that online learning is not for everybody. I have, we do train our facilitators in the use of the online course. They have in-depth knowledge of the content, but, they also need guidance in how to interact with people on line, how to send feedback to people on line, and so forth. I think working not only with the content developers but also with the facilitators, if that’s going to be part of your program is an important thing to take away from this.

**PC:** Well I can tell you that having once been a classroom teacher and combining that experience now with what I am learning about e-learning, the practically of your approach and your wisdom is most appreciated especially for our teachers who are out there often carrying much more than they should be carrying in their classroom instruction.

Well, Dr. Beech, I can’t thank you enough for the time that you have shared with me today and the lessons you have learned from experience. I look forward to seeing what new adventures in learning you take us on in the future.
PC: To learn more about Dr. Beech and her work in the field of exceptional student education, I invite you to visit the Accommodations and Modifications Project for Students with Disabilities. You can locate their website by going to the Florida Department of Education, linking to the Bureau of Exceptional Student Education and Student services and then connecting with Network Collaboration. You will find the Accommodations Project listed there. (http://www.cpt.fsu.edu/ese/) Also, for more information on the Learning Systems Institute at FSU, go to wwwlsi.fsu.edu.

Thank you so much for joining us today.

Summary of Main Points:

- The context of distance learning conducted by Dr. Marty Beech is professional development for in-service educators in support of students with disabilities.
- Dr. Beech’s skill development cycle for distance learning evolved from expertise in course development and classroom instruction at the university level, to online course instruction, and then to the development of all aspects of creating and delivering distance learning options.
- It became clear to Dr. Beech early on in the learning and development process that distance learning options required a higher level of clarity and specificity in the initial delivery of new learning than what she was accustomed to in the traditional learning environment.
- Dr. Beech began her learning venture into distance learning initially through trial and error. This quickly evolved into a hand on learning process through collaboration with experts at the Learning Systems Institute at Florida State University and collaboration with colleagues on a statewide level who were in the early stages of creating distance learning options for the Bureau of Exceptional Student Education and Student Services.
- A driving force behind the development of quality distance learning programs was the Florida Professional Development Protocol which is modeled after the National Staff Development Council Standards.
• Evaluation of distance learning in this venue was multifaceted and included: evaluation of participant skill knowledge, transfer of knowledge to K-12 classroom implementation, and direct impact on K-12 student achievement. In addition evaluation was on-going and included assessment of participant satisfaction.

• Dr. Beech is committed to online professional development for in-service educators that sets high, rigorous expectations. As a result, approximately 50% of in-service educators who ‘sign-up’ find it difficult to meet final course expectations. Those who do are reporting a positive impact on K-12 student performance that is consistent with controlled research studies.

• The Florida Department of Education and in particular, the Bureau of Exceptional Student Education and Student Services is developing a comprehensive network of experts and offerings in the area of online professional development for in-service educators.

• In order to be successful in the development and implementation of online professional development for in-service educators, Dr. Beech highly recommends a test of ‘reasonableness’ when setting outcome expectations for in-service educators coupled with the understanding that distance learning is clearly not suited for all in-service educators. Finally, it is critical that your course ‘facilitators’ be well trained in the unique features of distance learning protocol.

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