How Instructors Learn to Teach Online: What HRD Administrators Need to Know

Steven W. Schmidt
Elizabeth Hodge
Christina M. Tschida
East Carolina University
Growth of Online Education (Even before COVID-19)

- Courses
- Degree Programs
- Workplace training
Trends in Online Education

- Increases in the number of companies using e-learning
- Increase in courses and e-learning programs available to employees
- Decrease in self-paced e-learning
The Administrative Standpoint

- Online education as a component of an organization’s long-term strategy
  - Advances in technology
  - Budgetary issues
  - Cost-effectiveness
  - Replication and standardization
  - Employees want training opportunities...
    - .... of high quality
The role of the online instructor is different than the role of the face-to-face instructor.

- Different knowledge, skills, and attitudes are required.
The Role of the Instructor

Lecturer → Facilitator
Presenter → Guide or coach
Instructor → Instructional designer

Technology
Relationships
We learn to teach the way we were taught
We often develop coursework based on what was developed for us, as learners
Those who teach online and are developing courses online may not have any history as online learners.
Technology skills are critical
The clock is ticking……
As a Result.....

- Fear of online teaching
- Negative attitudes toward online teaching
- Questions about the value and legitimacy of online education
Study Questions

- What types of learning activities are helpful to instructors learning to teach online? What types are not helpful?

- What content areas should be addressed in professional development activities for online instructors?
Study Details

- Qualitative study
- Focus groups
- Focus groups of online instructors
  - All had f2f and online teaching experience
  - Variety of levels of experience
  - Variety of different subjects taught
- Data
  - Transcriptions, notes from participants, notes from researchers/facilitators
Findings: Four Themes

- Professional Development Topics
- Smaller, Focused Training
- Informal Learning
- Self-Directed Learning
Professional Development Topics

- Too much focus:
  - Use of technology

- Too little focus:
  - Pedagogy of teaching online
  - Curriculum design for online courses
Smaller and More Focused Training

- Not as helpful:
  - Larger group training sessions run at the broader organizational level

- Helpful:
  - Smaller group sessions run at the department or division level
  - Sessions focused on teaching online in a particular topic
Informal Learning
(Most common and most effective)

- Helpful:
  - Informal tutoring or mentoring sessions (small group or one-on-one)
  - Informal conversations
  - Learning in small pieces
  - Development of informal online teaching groups
Opportunities for Self-Directed Learning

Helpful:

- Access to resources
- Opportunities for product testing
- Opportunities for exploration
Recommendations

- Focus more on online curriculum development and pedagogy of online teaching
- Focus less on technology
- Offer professional development through a variety of channels
  - Smaller and more focused is better
  - Shorter sessions recommended
  - Provide opportunities to develop networks and learning communities
Moving to Online Teaching

- Initial feelings: worry, apprehension, unprepared, overwhelmed
- Sense of role ambiguity and confusion
- Struggle to master technology
- Motivation to succeed: desire to provide a quality educational experience for their learners.
Learning to teach online:

- Haphazard process
- Mostly informal learning
- Support from colleagues
- Trial and error
- Formal training not helpful
  - Mostly focused on technology rather than teaching
Progression of Online Instructors

- As instructors “matured”
  - More focus on student needs and individual students’ learning styles
  - More focused on improving communication
  - More focus on creativity
  - More confidence
Ideal Online Instructors

- Content knowledge is critical
- Technology knowledge is important
  - Tends to overshadow content
- Responsiveness is important
- Time commitment is great
Implications

- Understanding experience helps better prepare future online educators
- Roadmap for how to teach online educators
  - What to do
  - What not to do
Questions or Comments?

Thank you for attending!