Transformative Learning and Teaching: How Experienced Faculty Learned to Teach in the Online Environment

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Abstract

Emergent technologies and changing priorities in higher education are driving change in pedagogy and instructional practices in graduate education for professionals. How do instructors in an online doctoral program characterize their learning about designing and teaching courses in a fully online environment? This study documents participant perspectives within a program of support provided to experienced faculty moving into a fully online teaching environment. Cranton's (2002) facets of transformation structures were used to inform interview questions and to analyze faculty perspectives about their own development as online instructors. Findings suggest that reflection on practice, making meaning together, and sharing of expertise are essential for those navigating the unfamiliar landscape of online teaching and learning. While these early adopters developed and often taught courses online as independent contractors, they expressed appreciation for mentoring, technical support, and the emergence of a community of practice. Faculty sought dialogue with others who were doing the same work, developed coursework embracing the technology available, and worked independently, yet sought resources as needed and valued mentoring by knowledgeable others.

Keywords: faculty development, transformative learning

Introduction

When I was a brand-new Ph.D. teaching the 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. "after school" classes for working teachers and principals, a senior member of my college stated derisively, "If students can't devote themselves full-time to graduate education, I'm not teaching them." My, how times have changed! The economic realities of attracting and retaining "customers" require that educational institutions provide coursework that is responsive to students' academic and professional needs and personal schedules. In the Fall of 2014, 5.8 million students took some, or all, courses online (*On-line Report Card*, Babson Group, 2015). Faculty committed to providing a quality education to professionals, particularly those who work in the pressing conditions of under-served school districts, adult education, and other social services, have been reaching out to practitioners for generations, physically bringing coursework, professional development, and action research support to schools, districts, and agencies in rural and urban areas alike. However, technology now provides more efficient ways to extend that support. The challenge as

faculty is to reframe *how* one teaches, not *whom* one teaches (Clark-Ibanez & Scott, 2008; Marek, 2009; Savery & Duffy, 2001). One way to understand how faculty respond to the changing demands of teaching in the online environment is by evaluating their capacity to learn in the language of Cranton's transformative learning theory. Faculty face an activating event of changed expectations for their role as instructors, they question their own experiences as teachers and learners, they need to be open to alternative viewpoints, engage in discourse, and, they take actions on transformed assumptions and beliefs (2002, p. 66).

Statement of the Problem

As more faculty choose to teach online, or are pressured to do so by heightened competition for students and the changing role of professional education, the emphasis on improving instruction has emerged in the online environment (Schifter, 2000). While the challenges of learning to teach well in higher education are greater than ever, incentive to do so is problematic and governance structures flawed (Hoyt & Oviatt, 2013; Mullenburg & Berge, 2009; Schifter, 2000; Visser, 2009). Lack of instructional support, limited institutional resources, and often marginalized online programming continue to limit those who do embrace distance education (Marek, 2009; Schifter, 2000). Professional development is even less available for adjunct or part-time faculty (Higgins & Harreveld, 2013).

A number of universities have established systematic approaches to course design, faculty mentoring, and program evaluation that has greatly improved opportunities for mid-career and experienced faculty to make the transition to online or distance education (Buckenmeyer, Hixon, Barczyk, & Feldman, 2013; Hodge, Schmidt, & Tschida, 2013; Tobin, 2004). Even with support in place, instructors teaching in a different mode may struggle to accommodate new approaches to instruction. While there is some attention to the affective responses of adult learners who are students in the online environment (Zembylas, 2008), research on faculty development primarily addresses instructional skill development. They, too, have conflicted responses to a changing work environment (Clark-Ibanez & Scott, 2008). Exploration of faculty perceptions of learning to teach online will provide greater understanding of the challenges of this professional transition.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to document faculty perceptions of learning to teach online as they moved to a fully online teaching environment. The need for quality online instruction is growing; recent studies indicate that about 25 to 30 percent of higher education students now take at least one online course (Straumshein, 2014). As faculty members from across the spectrum of instructional philosophies join the ranks of online instructors, each brings different assumptions about pedagogy, curriculum, and assessment. Whatever their practices in previous settings, they must now design instruction and assessment that is student-centered, efficient, and measurable. The learning curve is steep, and the cultural context of higher education is not the most responsive (Hodge, Schmidt, & Tschida, 2013)

Research Question

The guiding research question for this qualitative study was: How do instructors in an online doctoral program characterize learning to design and teach courses in a fully online environment? An analysis of their responses to interview questions about their experiences are presented within a "transformative learning" theory framework.

Relevant Literature

Research on faculty development for, and within, the online learning environment is growing (Dawson, Dana, Wolkenhauer, & Krell, 2013; Hixon, 2008; Meyer, 2014; McQuiggen, 2007) as portrayed in a plethora of studies about evolution of higher education programming. The transition from on-ground teaching to on-line teaching has re-focused attention on changing instructional practice, pedagogy, and faculty development approaches. Hixon suggests the need for further study of "general faculty characteristics, faculty's motivation, faculty's approach to instruction, team dynamics, resources and support available" (2008). This study considered the strategies and processes used by the core faculty of an online doctoral program to design or refine instruction for the online environment. Researchers, Meyer and Murrell (2015), published a review of theories that support faculty development of online teaching, which inform the conceptual framework of this study. The majority of studies they reviewed draw upon adult learning theory and transformative learning theory.

Faculty are both adult learners and designers of coursework for students. Poorly designed online pedagogy can reflect face-to-face "sit and get" or, "read, listen to lectures and be tested" approaches. Recommended practice for online course development and evaluation (Caladine, 2008; Moore & Kearsley, 2012; Tobin, 2004) places constructivist teaching and learning at the center: "Constructivist philosophy accommodates a family of closely related pedagogies, which optimize the potential of e-learning environments" (McDonald & Twining, 2002, p. 604). Wherever faculty place themselves on the continuum of teaching philosophy, developing online courses pushes instructors to revisit, balance, and weave together constructive, or transformative, approaches to providing professional learning. After three decades of hybrid and fully online course and program development, technology has improved and instructional practices have become more sophisticated (Moore, 2013). While faculty who began teaching before the Internet, and when few individuals had personal computers, are not the majority of instructors in any university, they are part of the teaching force and play an essential role in providing online programming. They confront changing roles in both their identity as faculty who may have little influence on the institution's decision to offer online instruction (Hoyt & Oviatt, 2013), and yet face heightened expectations to teach effectively in the online environment (De Gagne & Walters, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

The next section provides a brief theoretical framework that informs the structure of the study. The three areas addressed are: adult learning, transformative learning, and critical reflection.

Adult Learning

Adult learning theory is broad and increasingly divergent, and has evolved from the "assumptions" articulated by Knowles (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2011) to current thinking about types of, and approaches to, adult learning (Merriam & Bierema, 2014). In this case study, adult professionals are challenged to reconcile decades of on-ground, or face-to-face, instruction within a different medium (Visser & Visser, 2000). Even the most skilled and dedicated instructors may find the transition away from known to unknown terrain a challenge.

The basic tenets of supporting successful adult learning or "andragogy" are based on the assumptions that the learner:

- Has an independent self-concept and who can direct own learning
- Has accumulated a reservoir of life experiences that is a resource
- Has learning needs closely related to changing social roles
- Is problem-centered and interested in immediate application of knowledge
- Is motivated to learn by internal rather than external factors (Knowles, 1984; Merriam & Bierema, 2014)

Additionally, adult learning in contemporary settings is evolving as the settings do. A study by Olson (2016) found that adult learning in innovative organizations required them to work in collaborative teams, to work with other agencies, and to solve problems that were not well formulated. These characteristics were less common in conventional university life, and are emblematic of the modernization of adult learning in the changing workplace and school environment (Conlan, Grabowski, & Smith, 2003; Gappa, Austin, & Trice, 2007).

Transformative Learning

Online instructors, as do any instructors, need to know about the content itself and how to engage with learners and the content, or what adult learning theorists call "informational" and "transformational" learning (Drago-Severson, 2012; Kegan, 2000). In this case, "informational learning" is what instructors need to know about the technology to teach in the online mode. The journey through the new landscape of online instruction requires adults to revisit attitudes and beliefs about "learning," and to accept (if not embrace) some level of discomfort. Transformative learning is a process through which adults might approach the complexities of new role expectations at work. Cranton (2002) provides this definition:

> At its core, transformative learning theory is elegantly simple. Through some event, which could be as traumatic as losing a job or as ordinary as an unexpected question, an individual becomes aware of holding a limited or distorted view. If the individual critically examines this view, opens herself to alternatives, and consequently changes the

way she sees things, she has transformed some part of how she makes meaning out of the world.

Whether an early adopter or a reluctant recruit to teaching online, faculty members must navigate changing expectations of instructors.

Critical Reflection

One of the central characteristics of transformational learning is reflection, during which the learner interprets actions, or professional practice, by more fully examining underlying belief systems (Brown, 2004; Cranton, 1996; Mezirow, 1998). Instructors benefit from critical reflection as they learn new teaching approaches in higher education. Drawing on the work of Mezirow, Roessger (2014) describes the role of reflection in adult learning in the context of problem-solving:

> When learners critically reflect on assumptions in task-oriented problem-solving, they engage in *objective reframing*. Learners use *narrative critical reflection* to assess the validity of knowledge and skills and *action critical reflection* to examine the assumptions underlying how a problem is defined. Here, learners critically reflect on the content, process, or premise of the problem to increasingly adapt or modify skills and knowledge to immediate contexts (p. 325).

The online faculty learning framework described here draws on adult learning theory (Kegan, 2000), transformative teaching and learning (Cranton, 2002; Shields, 2010), and critical reflection (Brown, 2004; Mezirow, 1998; Roessger, 2014).

Faculty who teach in the evolving learning setting are professionals who need to muster former and current skills and experiences to enact instruction in the fully online environment. Faculty are, themselves, transforming their practice, and striving to provide transformative learning opportunities for their students, who are also mid-career and mature professionals. Critical reflection is a constant companion, as instructors who seek to establish excellent pedagogy are in regular dialogue with themselves and with peers following the same path (if they are fortunate). Not only do early adopters among the faculty need to reconcile their emergent identities in the online course setting, they must also navigate being outliers in communities of practice that may not yet see their work as legitimate (De Gagne & Walters, 2010).

Methodology

This is a case study of core instructors from one education department who implemented a new, fully online doctoral program in educational leadership. Team members were co-researchers in the tradition of Participatory Action Research (Grogan, Donaldson, & Simmons, 2007; McIntyre, 2008), reflecting on their own learning as they navigated course design and program development. Stevens-Long, Schapiro, & McClintock (2012) draw from social emancipatory transformative literature and present "praxis" within that tradition. The team members engaged in a cycle of praxis: a systematic curriculum mapping process using currently accepted practice (action), worked with the instructional technologist, and each other, to design and critique their courses (critical reflection), and engaged in regular, online communication

strategies (dialogue) to refine course design and complete implementation.

Through a process of critical reflection, team members revisited the tenets of transformative learning (Cranton, 2002; Mezirow, 1998), constructed curriculum (Jacobs & Johnson, 2009; Weiner, 2011), and fashioned assessment protocols (see Quality Matters, Stevens & Levi, 2005). Interview questions reflect assumptions outlined in "auto-ethnography" (Holt, 2003; Reed-Danahay, 1997), an approach to critical reflection in which individuals describe their relationships to the larger culture. In this case, they are making sense of a personal, and often, unexplored part of professional work within a community of practice and in relation to a rapidly evolving curriculum delivery system.

Cranton's (2002) facets of transformation were used to create an interview protocol and to analyze responses to a set of interviews. Her facets include:

• An activating event that typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard, or read;

• Articulating assumptions, that is, recognizing underlying assumptions that have been uncritically assimilated and are largely unconscious;

• Critical self-reflection, that is, questioning and examining assumptions in terms of where they came from, the consequences of holding them, and why they are important;

• Being open to alternative viewpoints;

• Engaging in discourse where evidence is weighed, arguments assessed, alternative perspectives explored, and knowledge constructed by consensus;

• Revising assumptions and perspectives to make them more open and better justified

• Acting on revisions, behaving, talking, and thinking in a way that is congruent with transformed assumptions or perspectives.

The initial phase of the faculty development dimension of program evaluation focused on individual faculty perceptions about learning to teach online.

Sources of Evidence

This case study used individual faculty interviews to document their experiences about learning to teach online. The case includes eight instructors, ranging from full-time, department-based instructors, to part-time adjunct faculty. The group includes proficient, very experienced online instructors, and those early in the process of teaching in a fully online setting. Six of the eight are former teachers and teacher educators; two of the eight are a nursing educator and a business educator. They ranged in age from mid-30's to early-70's—seven of eight are women. The findings were first documented in a research paper presented at a regional conference (Collay, 2013).

Table 1 *Participants by Role and Course Designed*

Participant (pseudonyms)	Role in Program	Course Designed
Olga*	EdD Instructor	Qualitative Methods
Yolanda	EdD instructor	Literature Review
Carl	EdD Instructor, Founding Program Designer	Change Management (org theory)
Linda	EdD Instructor	Literature Review
Annabel	EdD Instructor	Policy Analysis
Molly	EdD Instructor	Preparation for Transformative Leadership Managing Change 2 (org theory)
Rita	MSEd Instructor	Advised Research Team
Donna	MSEd Instructor	Advised Research Team

Note: Olga's interview was the pilot and text from her interview appears in an earlier paper.

Interview Protocol

The department-based case study provided a forum for faculty to share their individual experiences as professionals learning new modes of instruction. My dual role as program director and a co-designer of many of the courses in the sequence and researcher influences and potentially limits the candidness of responses. Reflecting the work of Coughlin and Brannick (2014), the dynamics of studying one's own organization were present, providing both opportunity and challenge. In discussion of role duality, they recommend the following approach to perspective-taking: in first-person, researchers question their own assumptions through self-awareness and reflection; in second-person, researchers engage in collaborative inquiry; in third-person, researchers link practice with theory (p. 135).

All current faculty teaching in the Ed.D were invited to interview and were provided with an overview of the study. Faculty agreed to participate via email response. Following the interviews, participants were emailed a transcript of the notes taken, or interview transcripts for a member check. All of those invited agreed to participate. Interviews were conducted in the following two ways: (1) recordings were made using electronic meeting technology; (2) typed notes were collected from telephone or face-to-face interviews. Participants were emailed an one-page description of the study, interview questions, and information about the potential use of the data. A research proposal was filed with the institution's IRB and was approved.

The protocol followed for data analysis was the following: After member-check, transcripts were reviewed and responses to the interview questions were placed in a table. First, each transcript was reviewed and coded for content that addressed the questions. Responses from all interview transcripts were then analyzed against the Cranton facets and compared in a simple cross-case analysis. These two processes reflect recommendations by Creswell (2013) for identification of key concepts. Finally, the responses to "Questions we should be asking," was used inform "for further study" were documented for use in the final part of the paper.

The presentation below is a synthesis of responses to the interview questions. This section is followed by observations about and analysis of common themes, and demonstrates the alignment of the findings with transformative learning theory. Finally, conclusions and implications are addressed.

What is the name of the course you first designed? What compelled you to consider designing this course (in a distance or online mode)? The majority of the participants started out teaching courses for teachers completing licensure or master's degrees. Courses included Action Research, content area courses (history), adult education, leadership and introduction to teaching types of courses. In almost every case, instructors were asked to teach in an online setting by their administration to provide coursework for students to complete degree or licensure programs. Linda described her agency's decision to create online courses for rural teacher education candidates who could not otherwise enroll in coursework. "A lot of districts down there are very rural, a lot of the teachers have lived there their whole lives." In describing early master's degree completers, Carl said, "They were being pressured by their districts to get the advanced degree." Molly described a university-based graduate program that the department decided to offer as a hybrid, where the instructor would drive to different regional centers and teach the other centers via "polycam" or video technology. "We were trying to expand our program, the department said, "'This is the direction we're going to go.'"

Most were compelled by their employer to create a specific course or training module, whereas a few chose to engage in the design process out of interest and a desire to reach learners who would otherwise be excluded from educational opportunities. Annabel was "a teaching assistant and my mentor brought me into the online teaching." Carl recalled that "Canter created the coursework and our institution's faculty would do course review and approval." Molly was an adjunct faculty member at Florida State University and her department was adopting distance education strategies to reach students in rural areas of the state.

Most participants did not begin their distance or non-face-to-face teaching in the current, Blackboard environment, but were early adopters of other distance education approaches. Olga described teaching via video camera from UH Manoa to the outer islands, and Molly taught teachers in regional centers around southern Florida using a similar technology. Rita began as a distance educator using "course in a box" materials that later evolved into web-based coursework. Carl reported a similar, non-web-based pathway in his role as administrator of a continuing education unit in a small college. "We started by using e-mail with [another university]." At the youngest end of the age continuum, Donna's first experience with distance education was in her doctoral program. As a new professor in teacher education, Donna stated, "the course was in my load." She picked up an existing course and "deleted everything and started from scratch."

While most participants were required by higher education administrators to move their instruction into the distance or web-based environment, they also reported being "early adopters" in previous settings. Rita described her role as assistant principal supporting teachers to move from paper to email daily announcements. Molly stated, "I wanted to provide resources for the non-profit I worked for." Annabel, an early adopter as a student in a nursing master's degree program, and said, "When I was an online student, I fell in love with it!" Yolanda, a non-education instructor, worked as an assistant director in an MBA program for career changers. She began her online instruction when "my supervisor asked me to take those courses (that others couldn't or wouldn't), and then I started teaching courses I wanted to teach." Olga agreed to create the course as a favor to me as program director. She responded, "Compelled me? Well, I'm retired and I probably would never have tried to do it if I were teaching full time. I thought it would be good to learn something new."

What formal training have you taken to learn about online course development? The eight instructors I interviewed had little or no formal training in online instruction when they started. Donna described "a doctoral seminar in online teaching, but it wasn't helpful. So, I had to learn on my own." Carl described "coming here and conducting course reviews of 'course in a box' materials. I began to see that some of these things weren't developed as well as they could be." As a founding member of our online team, Olga took a formal course, and recalled, "the Quality Matters course was tremendously helpful. It really helped me to get what online learning was really about and how it is different than face-to-face."

How would you characterize your learning to design an online course? Linda recalled a small team of instructors charged to create coursework for rural education students. "I developed courses as part of my day job—trial and error." Yolanda learned about course design by picking up existing courses. "I'm pretty good at it now. I know what I want, I can visualize it." Molly described her approach by stating, "I would say by reading. I didn't engage in workshops. I was engaged in technology as a classroom teacher, when I wanted to learn, I

Googled it." All participants described learning to teach online as an independent, self-directed effort. Donna recalled, "I had to learn on my own." Carl reported, "Most of my learning was ad hoc—learning by doing. Linda reflected that "really, it's been trial and error, finding things that worked, seeing if there were ways to make Blackboard work." Annabel, one of the most experienced instructors on several platforms, noted that, "a lot is OJT (On-the-Job Training)" and said she completed her master's degree fully online in 2001—definitely early days for online instruction. Most found themselves on their own as learners. Olga described:

> It's sort of like a jagged line. It just goes up and down and up and down and up and down. Sometimes I feel like, 'oh this is great, they're learning something, I'm reaching people from all over the country.' And other times, it's bombing, it's not going well at all. If I were to chart my course, it would have to be that really jagged line. I think it would go up, I mean, I am learning! How would I characterize my learning? Hit and miss!

Who/what was most helpful in supporting your learning? Rita described an "Ed tech (teacher's aide) in our school who was highly motivated and enthusiastic about supporting our staff. She showed me how to do things." Molly described "Seeking resources independently. In terms of designing courses, you have been helpful. Having conversations about the course, looking at how you've designed the groups, encouraging students to reach out (meet synchronously). Yolanda noted that "other faculty members were probably the biggest support," along with technology people at her former and current institution. In her day job, she trains mentors within a highly technical framework and uses a lot of web-based media. Donna said, "It was helpful spending time looking at Blackboard resources more generally. A lot of those things that were in these model courses, we don't do here. I'm picking it up as I go along." Carl stated, "My own experience as a teacher and administrator, went to conferences, workshops, gradually accumulated experience." Rita added, "The word that comes up right now is research, investigative work. I go online, I take the best examples and I put them together."

What are your next steps as a learner about online course development? Molly reported that she will "take additional courses, I'd like to go into the student mode. There are courses at (regional college), I'd like to learn how they generate those kind of materials. I will continue to read." Donna described going into the research, "Doing my own research within the courses is forcing me to dive into the literature. I try to improve each time." Annabel asked, "Where can I go from here? It seems so unimaginable! When my daughters go to college, what will it be like?" Rita is "undertaking a large course revision effort of five Certificate of Advanced Graduate Studies (CAGS) courses, top to bottom." She would like to see "department-level colleagues trading strategies." Linda stated, "I'd like to keep working on designing courses with someone who is a good mentor." Olga indicated, "Now I'm trying to spread out and try some new things I didn't have time to try last time." Rita summed it up this way: "It's great to sit there on the couch working out how to do things on your own, but it's also important to work with another person."

What questions should I ask moving forward? As the program evaluation framework is put into place, instructors continue to collaborate in program design, through course creation and refinement, assessment approaches, and improving instructional approaches. In the tradition of Participatory Action Research (PAR), they will also craft the next round of research on their own

learning. Participants were asked for additional questions that should be used in an interview or focus group. These will also inform our next steps within the department and future studies.

Molly: How are you enculturated into an online teaching experience? Where do you see the tensions between online and face to face teaching? How can we maintain each other as a resource and have the hard conversations?

Olga: What were supports and barriers to your learning?

Carl: How have your perceptions of your role as a teacher changed? Do you feel more or less valued as a teacher and mentor?

Linda: What do people like about it? I think there are some very different answers . . . I like to teach people all over the country and engage in dialogue with them.

The questions proposed by the participants who are members of this faculty team provide some insight into how they each made sense of their journey and what they experienced as transformed learners. As each reflects on the "supports and barriers" they encountered, the concepts of perspective-taking, perceptions about learning, and reconciling tensions between the two learning environments are evident in these reflections.

Reflections on Learning to Teach Online

Responses to the interview prompts were analyzed to illuminate common themes. In the next section, themes from the interview transcripts are presented with supporting excerpts from individual participants.

Improving instruction occurs much the same way as it does in face to face teaching. Participants used formal and informal feedback from students to improve course design and instruction. Donna noted that: "The goal was to have students research a topic and share some practical research with each other. They didn't really share, it was a poor assignment on my part." Carl stated that he "got a lot student feedback" in his journey toward course improvement. Annabel recalled her early years moving into online teaching, and noted, "We're all novices when we start something new. I might be an expert in some things, but not in others."

Online technology allows instructors to integrate student groups. Molly used the interactive technology to bring students together from different cultural perspectives. "I first imagined working via Blackboard to cross-pollinate between the cohorts. They are culturally very different. For example, the Ocala area is very rural, Fort Lauderdale is very urban, then there was the island nature of the Keys." Carl noted that, when he first began to modify 'course in a box' materials, he saw opportunities to improve instruction beyond the basic reading and writing format, and his current course design attends carefully to grouping. Rita described "looking at how you've designed the groups" as part of her design process.

Faculty made observations about why some colleagues were not moving into the online environment. Donna described her observations about non-adopters, guessing that "Fear, not being comfortable with their computer, always having problems, not comfortable with the technology" might prevent people from stepping into online teaching. "There are just faculty who absolutely believe you have to have face-to-face instruction." Rita reflected on her experience leading a grant for technology adoption by teachers, "If they could see technology as

a useful tool, they'd want to know more about it. There may not be somebody there to influence them, to take away that fear."

Faculty seek dialogue with others who are doing the same work. Linda described the importance of ongoing conversations with other faculty: "Most helpful was the dialogue. Being able to go back and forth, and say, 'what do you think of this, what do you think of that?'" Molly found that, "Having conversations about the course, looking at how you've designed the groups, encouraging students to reach out (to meet synchronously). Olga found dialogue with our IT (Instructional Technologist) very helpful. "You, your meetings with all the faculty so I could talk to the people that were going to come before me and after me, and also (IT support person). Those were all very helpful." Rita would like to see more "department level swapping."

Transforming Practice to Teach Online

The Cranton (2002) transformative learning facets guided the design of the study and the development of the interview questions. Responses reflect participants' meaning making in a new teaching environment and framed the analysis of individual reflections and self-dialogue. Transformative learning theory was a useful approach for faculty to examine assumptions about roles as instructors and learners in the fully online environment. In this section, the facets are presented with descriptions of faculty reflections on their learning.

An activating event that typically exposes a discrepancy between what a person has always assumed to be true and what has just been experienced, heard, or read. The primary activating event moving these faculty members into online teaching was being asked to create or convert on-ground coursework to the online environment. A rapidly changing higher education environment continues to pressure faculty into hybrid and fully online teaching, often with few resources or support. In this pilot study, instructors now choosing to teach in a fully online program described the role of early distance and online teaching experiences in their overall career as teachers. What participants assumed to be true was that students needed access to coursework and, as instructors in the field, they were able and willing to provide that access.

Articulating and revising assumptions, that is, recognizing underlying assumptions that have been uncritically assimilated and are largely unconscious. This group of faculty members has made the leap into the online environment. For the most part, they describe a continuum of learning about teaching that is an extension of their previous work experience in the "regular" classroom. They made observations about others who have been less comfortable moving into the on-line environment. While one participant noted he wished he had moved into the medium sooner, he and the others described learning to teach online as one more step in a longer journey of early adoption of technology. Building on previous experiences, however, did not diminish the challenges presented in the new medium.

Critical self-reflection, that is, questioning and examining assumptions in terms of where they came from, the consequences of holding them, and why they are important. The responses captured in this pilot study indicate that these instructors treated their learning to teach online in a similar way to how they learned to teach face to face. The reflections reported here articulated that "good teaching" in the online environment was of utmost importance. Participant

reflections contained many examples of learning by trial and error, needing to seek technical support, and the importance of peer exchange. They examined their assumptions about the work of teaching online in the context of their early experiences.

Being Open to Alternative Viewpoints

There were several examples in the interviews about faculty seeking information from instructional technologists, responding to student input and feedback, and, when possible, seeking support through dialogue with other online instructors or technical support staff. Previous experiences with other forms of distance education ("course in a box," teaching from centers via polycam) might be construed as alternative viewpoints that led to their current ability to adopt new approaches to teaching. More relevant, however, were participant reflections on colleagues who have not yet taught using distance technology, which they characterized as fear-based and discomfort with technology. Those alternative viewpoints were noted, but not a limitation to their own learning.

Engaging in discourse, where evidence is weighed, arguments assessed, alternative perspectives explored, and knowledge constructed by consensus. Participants described useful dialogue with other instructors, IT/ID (instructional technologists and designers), with students via formal and informal feedback, and with me throughout the course design process. Much of exploring perspectives was expressed as the individual conducting research and seeking out resources and models of teaching. The interview protocol provided additional opportunities for discourse about how we are learning to teach online.

Revising assumptions and perspectives to make them more open and better justified. The questions elicited responses about learning to teach in a new medium and continuous improvement, which parallels how one learns to teach in the face-to-face environment. Several faculty recognized that, while they were on their own as early adopters, they preferred interacting with knowledgeable others to improve their practice.

Acting on revisions, behaving, talking, and thinking in a way that is congruent with transformed assumptions or perspectives. These faculty members represent instructional leaders who have always been open to whatever technologies would allow them to reach students beyond the conventional classroom. Ranging in age from mid-30's to early 70's, everyone on the core faculty sought continuous improvement on their own part and strived to design a quality product for students. Their presence as core faculty developing an online program indicates they are acting in congruence with transformed assumptions.

Conclusions

Core faculty members in this study represented the continuum of online instructors: from very experienced through newcomers to online instruction. As they co-constructed their curriculum and instruction, they drew on their own experience, sought technical support, and drew from online sources. Faculty learning occurred in the context of faculty support at several levels: Resources, training, mentoring, and formal interaction between instructors and with knowledgeable others. Each participant in this study reported changes that reflect

"transformative learning" as they faced an activating event of changed expectations for their role as instructors, questioned their own experiences as teachers and learners, and strived to be open to alternative viewpoints. They described engaging in discourse and taking actions based on transformed assumptions and beliefs (Cranton, 2002, p. 66).

Faculty Members Developed Coursework Embracing the Technology Available

Faculty members' interview responses about their decisions to engage in online instruction varied as individuals drew from earlier experiences in face-to-face instruction to inform their practice. Instructors worked systematically through program and course design processes to refine content (resources), instructional strategies, and assessments. Instructors considered feedback from the instructional technologist, program director, students (during and after the course), and peers. Faculty members embraced opportunities to teach in distance and online settings over their careers, often the early adopter in their settings. While their histories of being early adopters limited opportunities for systematic learning about online instruction, they expressed appreciation for mentoring, technical support, and their emergent community of practice. This finding aligns with research by Vaill and Testori (2012), who evaluated online instruction orientation and documented faculty appreciation for technical support within a cohort of instructors.

The instructors in this study have been early adopters and have been willing to reach out to distance students via the technology available at the time, whether mailing a "course in a box," speaking by telephone, teaching via a poly-cam, or using early versions of web-based communication modalities. Online instruction is not presented as external to individuals' experience as educators, but rather, part of a longer continuum of innovative practice. A recent study by Angolia and Pagliari (2016) recognized that "distance education is entering its fourth generation, requiring universities to consider how to sustain this continually evolving delivery method" (n.p.). Perhaps this perspective of change over time mitigates the notion that online instruction is still divergent from the mainstream.

Faculty Worked Independently yet Sought Resources as Needed

The norm for learning about online teaching was primarily characterized as independent, on-the-job training. Instructors also reported examples of systematic refinement or cycles of continuous improvement as they sought to improve the quality of their online instruction within courses and over time as new technology became available. This finding reflects the presence of "experiential learning," noted by Meyer and Murrell (2015) as one of the most prevalent theories supporting faculty development for online learning.

Even though participants work intrepidly as independent contractors, they valued opportunities to work with others. While instructors learned to teach online primarily through trial and error, when support was offered or mentoring available, it was welcome. Instructors are hungry for dialogue about teaching (Buckenmeyer et. al, 2013; Pataraia, Margaryan, Falconer, I; Littlejohn, and Falconer, J., 2014)

Faculty Members Valued Mentoring by Knowledgeable Others

The work of the "knowledgeable other," in this case, both peer instructors and instructional technologists, contributed to participants' development. Mentoring to improve instruction in higher education has always been limited, but new pressures on faculty to teach with unfamiliar media using more constructivist pedagogy may compel administrators to provide stronger support and resources. Marek (2009) studied structural supports necessary for comprehensive adoption of online instruction, and recommends that university faculty development teaching centers commit to supporting quality online instruction. Clark-Ibanez and Scott (2008) cite research suggesting online courses are not simply face-to-face courses converted to new media. "Creating an effective online course requires varied skills that are seldom found in one faculty member" (p. 36). In a study of faculty learning to teach online, De Gagne and Walters (2010) found that:

> Several participants expressed the importance of *mentoring* in the early stages of online teaching practice. One suggested that it is necessary to find a good mentor, ideally two: one who knows the content of the course, and the other who knows the technical system, such as how to post, when to respond, and who to call for help. (n.p.)

The "community of practice" (Wenger, 1998) in the online program setting is, ironically, developed in a more visible and public setting than are conventional programs. Every facet of our courses was visible for critique and feedback, unlike face-to-face teaching. "Peer review" of our course design process requires systematic protocols so the designer has trust in the process. Teaching is very individual and personal, whether on-ground or online. While these instructors recognized tensions between those who teach in the fully online environment and those who haven't yet, they did not characterize that tension as a limitation to their own growth or philosophy. They were not concerned with traditional faculty's negative portrayal of online programming, a phenomenon noted by some researchers (Peach & Bieber, 2015).

Implications

Individual narratives are never proffered as "generalizable" (Merriam, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Rueschemeyer, 2003); however, the common experiences expressed by senior faculty learning to teach online are instructive. Their collective understanding of the journey of moving through one or more generations of distance, media-enhanced, interactive instruction, will parallel those of online faculty elsewhere. This action research study informs faculty development practice and strengthens the emergent field of online instruction professional development (Meyer & Murrell, 2015; McIntyre, 2008). Many factors influence online faculty development (Buckenmeyer, et. al, 2013; Hixon, 2008) and the transformative learning lens provides another look at adult development in the context of online instruction. Reflection on practice, making meaning together, and sharing of expertise are essential for those navigating the unfamiliar landscape of online teaching and learning.

Samaras and colleagues (2014) documented their collective, cross-disciplinary reflections on their teaching and described the power of the community to support transformed practice: "Enacting the self-study methodology reaffirmed our commitment to improving our teaching in a transparent and documented process with peer review" (p. 382). Their findings are especially cogent when considering faculty development for online instruction:

As faculty efforts in collective self-study to improve teaching allow individuals to transcend the technical and transform their teaching from the inside out, they are particularly applicable to periods of potentially disruptive innovation and change within the academy (Samaras, et. al, p. 383).

Research about the role of transformative learning for faculty striving to teach effectively in the online environment will continue to expand. Adult learning theory provides a strong foundation for researchers to more fully examine and interpret faculty development. The transparency of course content, design, and assessments in the online learning environment provides a window into how faculty think about teaching in so many ways, in contrast to the less visible world of traditional teaching. Peer engagement between online faculty about their teaching has, to some degree, disrupted the isolated, "independent contracting" nature of higher education instruction. Such transparency makes possible a powerful shared community, transforming instructors and their practice.

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Interview Documentation

Communities of practice:
A case study of one department's on-line teaching and learning development

Purpose of the study: To document experienced education faculty perceptions of learning to design and teach online courses. Findings will allow program leaders to:

- improve course development strategies through more focused PD;
- provide useful resources to instructors;
- collect data for program evaluation and publication.

Research question: How do instructors in an online doctoral program characterize their learning about designing and teaching a course in a hybrid or fully online environment?
Participants: Online instructors in the Education doctoral program and members of the Department of Education who are teaching online courses
Prompts for individual interviews or focus group(s);

1) What is the name of the course you first designed? What compelled you to consider designing this course?
2) What formal training have you taken to learn about online course development?
3) How would you characterize your learning to design an online course?
4) Who/what was most helpful in supporting your learning?
5) What are your next steps as a learner about online course development?

Online faculty meetings will be recorded through online meeting technology. The audio track will be transcribed and excerpts used for program evaluation and publication. Please reply via email if you would prefer that your reflections and analyses not be used for publication.

In addition to recording online faculty meetings, I plan to interview members of the Education Doctoral faculty, in person or via online meeting technology about the questions above. Are you willing to participate in an interview? You are not required to do so and your decision will have no bearing on your membership in the online instructor group.
The program evaluation plan has been reviewed by *Institution* and is available for your review.

Thank you for your consideration!

Mentoring Model

We used a lead instructor and support instructor model sharing a large class rather than having each instructor take a smaller cohort. There are two main purposes for this approach: To create a more fluid environment to move students in and out of study groups, and to provide modeling for the less experienced instructor. While a roster of 50 students is large, two instructors are able to divide the groups into sub-sections for interactive work, assignment evaluation, and advising tasks.

Lead Instructor			Associate instructor		
Section One 25 - 30			Section Two 25 - 30		
Discussion 8 - 12	Discussion 8 - 12	Discussion 8 - 12	Discussion 8 - 12	Discussion 8 - 12	Discussion 8 - 12
Role-alike	Role-alike	Role-alike	Role-alike	Role-alike	Role-alike
a a a a a	b b b b b	c c c c c	g g g g g	h h h h h	i i i i i
d d d d d	e e e e e	f f f f f	j j j j j	k k k k k	l l l l l
Cohort-wide activities (wiki, blog, other fora with short postings, such as references)					