

Guest Editors' Introduction: Online Teaching and Learning: Preparation, Development, and Organizational Communication

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Online teaching and learning have become common to many academic and business organizations (see, e.g., Aldrich 2004; Driscoll & Carliner, 2005; Schank, 2002, 2005). We conceptualize online teaching and learning, or e-learning, “as the formal and informal delivery of learning and professional development activities (including training), processes, and associations via any electronic methods including but not limited to the Internet, CD-ROM, videotape, and DVD” (Hewett & Ehmann, 2004, p. xv; see also de Leeuwe, 2004; Stockley, 2006, from whom we have drawn for this definition). Within academia in particular, a growing number of traditional colleges and universities currently conduct academic courses—such as rhetoric and technical communication—in the online environment. Many times, students need acculturative exercises to assess their readiness for the online environment as well as possible follow-up orientation. In the same vein, those who are teaching online and administering such programs also need orientation and training for their own readiness in the online environment. They need training at the organizational and programmatic levels for more than their technical platform-specific skills development. Of equal if not greater importance, online educators need training for the practical and theoretical transfer of pedagogical principles and practices to online environments. Similarly, nontraditional educational institutions that provide learning assistance to distance learners, for example, also conduct employee training and development. They provide online consumer-based education in common subjects as well. In any of these cases, online training quite often oc-

curs at a distance and engages distance learning principles and processes for online instructors much like those that their distance-based students will experience.

For these educational organizations there exists a crucial concern: What kinds of educational principles and processes address the very real challenges that arise when an institution conducts some or all of its training and professional development online using the Internet and other online modalities? This special issue of *Technical Communication Quarterly (TCQ)* explores such organizational concerns as well as the needed preparation and development strategies that arise for educators in online teaching and learning.

PRIMARY THEMES

Throughout this special issue of *TCQ* runs the theme of training and professional development for online instructors who will be or are engaged in online or Internet-based modes of education. Given that the pressure for educators to use technology is greater than ever before, this special issue of *TCQ* is born out of professional development needs shared by contemporary traditional and nontraditional educational institutions:

- To succeed in online environments and with online media, professionals cannot rely solely on methods deemed successful in conventional, brick-and-mortar situations; rather, they need instructional approaches that address distinctive qualities of teaching and learning online.
- As such, professionals need adequate orientation about online teaching and learning approaches.
- Of equal importance, the individuals responsible for creating and/or organizing orientation for colleagues also must consider training methodologies that are most appropriate for this type of professional development.

Like our contributing authors, we see the fundamental need to embrace the pedagogical implications of online teaching and learning. Understanding how to teach online does not just entail learning new technology, which, of course, we must do to varying degrees; it also involves a deepening knowledge of how students respond to and learn in online settings. Indeed, it requires becoming a student again in the realm of educational technology—listening to our inner voices where, as learners in relatively uncharted learning environments, we alternatively teach others and allow them to teach us. Every encounter with online teaching and learning thus becomes a sort of informational interview or experiential research project with the online media, the course work, our own pedagogies, and—of course—the students and their learning processes. Although much has been written about online teaching and learning generally (see, e.g., Dabbagh & Bannan-Ritland, 2004;

Oram, 2006; Palloff & Pratt, 2005), a gap exists regarding the specific issue of training and professional development for those instructors who will be teaching online. We argue, therefore, for an increasing understanding of professional development and teacher mentorship in online environments via theoretical and empirical research grounded in a practical appreciation of assessing what works in various online settings.

The three articles included in this special issue of *TCQ* take us a step closer to the goal of more research and scholarship surrounding online training. Readers will find that the pieces here consider implications for both United States and international contexts. Our intention in compiling this special issue is to help practitioners, teachers, and researchers to understand training and development principles specifically geared to such subjects as the delivery and conduct of online educational programs; issues of communication among administrators, online trainers, and online trainees; technologies and organizational dynamics as related to preparing for online education at various levels; and research and materials that students of technical communication might encounter pursuant to these concerns. The primary themes of this issue revolve around offering new insights into commonly held educational principles and practical activities that online training necessitates: investigation, individualization, immersion, association, and reflection into the online training processes and experiences (Hewett & Ehmann, 2004; Hewett & Ehmann Powers, 2005). In addition, this special issue addresses the “successes” as well as “lessons learned” in the development of online programs, such that readers can better understand the implications of applying such principles in online practice, education, and research.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS OF THE CURRENT LITERATURE

With an eye to improving practices and refining theory, this special issue can provide a transitional step toward developing a standards-based conceptual framework for training and professional development for online contexts. For educational institutions in today’s market, there is an ever-growing pressure to leverage technology to reduce costs, make training and professional development more efficient, and increase retention—all while maintaining the highest standards of quality (see, e.g., Cheville, 2004; Graves & Twigg, 2006; Johnson, 2004; Schank, 2002, 2005; Twigg, 2003). Such high-stakes outcomes demand that those who use online technologies to do their jobs—whether for teaching in traditional educational settings or for professional development in nontraditional settings like self-identified for-profit online universities—must develop their practices in robust ways. It is all too often the case, however, that those who teach and train online are thrown—unprepared—into the pool and asked to swim the virtual waters, as Kelli Cargile Cook suggests in this special issue, with little to no guidance. Such a

sink-or-swim attitude comes from a problematic assumption that teaching and learning online involves skills that are transparently or automatically transferred from traditional settings. Indeed, this attitude also is manifested in an astonishing paucity of published literature relevant to the principles and processes of preparing educators for online experiences. A brief review of the literature confirms that the urgency of our call for critical discussion and research about online training and development is pressing. For example, according to the U.S. Department of Education, 1,680 academic institutions offered approximately 54,000 online courses in 1998, which was an increase of about 70% over such courses in 1995. With about 1.6 million students enrolled in online courses in 2000, it is clear that any trend upward of these figures is significant to educators (Boehle, Dobbs, & Stamps, 2000, p. 34; see also National Center for Education Statistics, 2002). In more recent findings, I. Elaine Allen and Jeff Seaman (2004) of the Sloan Consortium reported that 1,971,397 college-level students took at least one online course in Fall 2003, whereas 2,634,189 were predicted to take at least one online course in Fall 2004 (p. 5). Yet, in the educational arena, instructors are often sent unprepared to teach and train others for online environments. Lester Faigley (1999), for example, juxtaposed the efficacy of educators who undergo training for online instruction with the odds that they “are probably the most poorly supported” of all professional technology users (p. 138). More recently, Jane Blakelock and Tracy E. Smith (2006) called for “developing more appropriate and useful assessment of online writing-intensive teaching and learning,” which demonstrates that “quality teaching” remains a goal that requires ongoing professional developmental support (pp. 157, 159). Highlighting that such support optimally requires educators to meet their trainers online, in *Preparing Educators for Online Writing Instruction: Principles and Processes* (Hewett & Ehmann, 2004), we argued that trainees should be immersed in a replicated distance environment that mirrors the setting and experiences common to their students—an argument that both Cargile Cook and Lisa Meloncon proffer in this special issue.

Indeed, even in corporate professional development programs from which educators might adapt training practices, too little training occurs that actually employs the online media through which employees will conduct their work (Hewett & Ehmann Powers, 2005). John V. Moran and Haidee E. Allerton (2000) agreed, citing that in 1999 “only 2 percent of training was Web-based ... [and] 75 percent of that was in information technology. Of \$63 billion spent on training, only \$1.14 billion of that was over the Web” (p. 31; see also Barkley & Bianco, 2001). Such statistics suggest that many who use online media to teach and train are insufficiently or nonoptimally prepared for online work settings. Although the development of online learning platforms, software, and online learning objects tend to attract significant financial resources, Hewett and Ehmann (2004) noted that “precious few dollars are spent on teacher training, particularly on training that supersedes learning how to navigate a specific electronic platform and that ad-

resses, instead, the pedagogy of online teaching and learning” (p. xiii). Yet as we have indicated in this Introduction, the online education that occurs in traditional, distance-based endeavors is too important and pervasive to neglect. Critical work that addresses professional development in online settings, however, is relatively limited. Others such as Cargile Cook and Keith Grant-Davie (2005) have agreed: “We are still discovering the implications of teaching with these new instructional media, and we have only begun to discuss how best we should use them and why those uses are best” (p. 2).

A review of the literature reveals that prominent professional journals and books tend to have few discussions about online training and professional development for educators. *Computers and Composition Online (CCO)*, for example, has published only a few online training-specific pieces since its launch as an online journal. In 2003, Evan Davis and Sarah Hardy authored “Teaching Writing in the Space of Blackboard,” which addressed some teaching strategies albeit specific to the particular Blackboard platform. Generally, however, CCO’s “Professional Development” section has presented somewhat esoteric, nontraining-based offerings (see <http://www.bgsu.edu/cconline/prodev.htm>).

Similarly, the print journal *Computers and Composition* has a long history of addressing issues relevant to contemporary views of student learning and social responsibility in teaching with technology (see, e.g., Smith, 2004) and, most recently, it has published its own special issue (2006) about evolving perspectives on distance learning. This issue usefully addressed such general online education issues as the needs of adult online learners (Blair & Hoy, 2006), software costs (Reilly & Williams, 2006), usability (Miller-Cochran & Rodrigo, 2006), and class power (Anderson, 2006) and dynamics (Kiefer, 2006). Among the few exceptions to the pattern of ignoring online educator professional development, notably in this issue, Kristine Blair and Cheryl Hoy (2006) considered how a need for individual dialogue between students and instructors influences the time and energy that instructors must expend for successful online courses, and they suggested that adequate supervisory evaluation of such roles requires different supervision and peer review strategies like those of training online instructors (pp. 45–47). Also notable in this issue, Hewett (2006) considered the online training issues that emerged from a small-scale empirical study of synchronous whiteboard instruction, which include a need for modeling of strong interactions, simulations, or role play experiences, and “reflective experimentation” (pp. 24–25). Standing out in its uniqueness of discussions of online training in *Computers and Composition*, Barbara Blakely Dufflemeyer’s (2003) “Learning to Learn: New TA Preparation in Computer Pedagogy” specifically addressed the orientation of teaching assistants for online educational settings.

Yet even Web texts for the online journal *Kairos: Rhetoric, Technology, Pedagogy* have not tended to address the general training and preparation needs of potential and new online instructors. For instance, Brown and Elias (2001) consid-

ered the sociopolitical issues in the online classroom, but the absence of a discussion about other essential training is notable. More closely aligned with the themes we have targeted for this special issue, Cynthia L. Walker (2001) offered a useful set of guidelines for online instructors that she gleaned from listening to her students' feedback, and Cheryl Greene, Teryl Sands-Herz, Zach Waggoner, and Patricia Webb (2002) considered how students need ample preparation for participating in their online writing courses. Based on their exploration of online teacher-student interactions and their professional development experiences, Hewett and Ehmann Powers (2005) provided practical suggestions for online training of professional writing instructors.

In a similar vein, few previous issues of *TCQ* have tapped the issues surrounding online training and professional development. The Winter 1999 special issue, for example, entitled "Technical Communication, Distance Learning, and the World Wide Web," included only one essay on training and training tools relevant to technical writing (Driscoll & Reid, 1999). Additional noteworthy resources exist in particular collections (see, e.g., Beason, 2000), and through their work with *Corous* (www.corous.com), Gilly Salmon (2001, 2002) and Jim Flood (2002) have addressed e-learning and e-training within UK contexts. Together and individually, Hewett and Ehmann Powers have addressed issues of instructor training in light of instructor and student perceptions and process analysis of synchronous and asynchronous teacher-student interactions (e.g., Ehmann, 2001; Ehmann & Hewett, 2005; Ehmann Powers, 2006; Hewett, 2001, 2005, 2006). In general, such offerings from Dufflemeyer, 2003, and compendium books (e.g., Takayoshi & Huot's 2003 book that provides introductory articles to online instruction) begin to address the gap regarding training for online instructors. Somewhat rare are full-length books such as Hewett and Ehmann's (2004) book about training online writing instructors. Cargile Cook and Grant-Davie's (2005) compilation of issues and answers about online education also dealt directly with training and development. In Cargile Cook and Grant-Davie's book, Nancy Coppola (2005) addressed online instructors' changing roles for technical communication, in particular; Helen M. Grady and Marjorie T. Davis (2005) explored the practice of instructional and procedural scaffolding in relation to online teaching. This relative dearth of literature, however, highlights the need for attention to issues relating to online training and professional development. We submit, therefore, that a *TCQ* special issue dedicated to the aforementioned issues is long overdue.

AREAS OF DISCUSSION

Acknowledging the aforementioned gaps in the current literature, we found that the majority of prospective authors who responded to our call for papers for this special issue tended to emphasize important issues central to online education, particularly from the student point of view. However, remarkably few proposed to ad-

dress the issues of preparing educators for the online instruction directly. We think that this lack of focus on the actual intent of this special issue is related to the absence of shared vocabulary specific to online training and instructor preparation. For example, some educators in the humanities have expressed discomfort with the language of *training* versus *educating* other instructors; yet much of the existing literature can be found in the human resources field, where organizational development and training are more commonly discussed and where “training” is a key word. Vocabulary issues raise the convergence of unfamiliar disciplinary concerns relative to e-learning and adult education, or andragogy, wherein there is a good deal of current attention to the professional development needs of those who teach and provide training in online settings (see, e.g., Salmon, 2002; Schank, 2002). Additionally, although many prospective authors for this special issue focused their proposals on issues that technical communication educators typically would encounter, those issues quite often could be extended to the more general questions of teaching rhetoric and writing in online settings. Indeed, even those submissions that are published in this special issue address issues that, though of value to technical communicators, can be extended usefully to a broader audience of rhetoric and writing educators.

The three articles published in this issue address the following types of questions:

- What practical concerns arise within organizational structures when the training and development activities occur solely—or mostly—through online and/or distance-based educational technologies?
- How can educators best prepare themselves and others for the challenges involved in online training?
- What does empirical evidence reveal about the online class development and, in turn, the training process? How can that evidence be applied, if at all, to other situations?
- In what ways, if any, do new technologies influence the principles and processes that are or can be applied to online training and development in different educational settings?
- What specific support and experiences do educators-as-learners who are new to an online environment need for their professional development?
- In what ways and for what purposes should students of technical communication receive training through online media? How can their experiences as students be understood theoretically? And how can these experiences be measured and researched?

Kirk St. Amant opens this special issue with his practical examination of training issues specific to global distance learning settings in his essay, “Online Education in an Age of Globalization: Foundational Perspectives and Practices for Technical Communication Instructors and Trainers.” Addressing the issue of online

teaching and learning and implications for training when internationally situated participants meet distance classes, St. Amant provides an overview for understanding the growing global market in online education. He begins with the proposition that online access and interest in technical communication are increasing both domestically and internationally. He argues that educators and trainers are uniquely poised, therefore, to consider offering online instruction to students located around the world. Highlighting the complexity that comes with the development of online courses and subsequent teaching for diverse audiences, the second half of St. Amant's article presents practical strategies for (a) developing online courses for more effective international delivery, and (b) the training of online instructors who may work with such global populations.

Lisa Meloncon's "Exploring Electronic Landscapes: Technical Communication, Online Learning, and Instructor Preparedness" draws on metaphors central to cultural geography in discussing online educator preparation. She engages theories and language of cultural geography to consider how educators can self-select and determine their own readiness for online instruction—a necessary first step for teaching effectively in online settings. Beginning and ending with her own concerns about teaching technical communication in online settings, Meloncon develops a practical framework for reading and interpreting the landscape of one's readiness for online instruction. Her heuristic approach can assist readers in determining whether they want to teach online and to what degree they might be suitable by nature or circumstance to teaching in online settings.

Concluding this special issue is Kelli Cargile Cook's article, "Immersion in a Digital Pool: Training Prospective Online Instructors in Online Environments." Cargile Cook argues that the online environment is ideal for teaching prospective instructors about the development and implementation of online courses. The author uses hypertext theories and data gathered from her own empirical research about the values of a course archive. The archive, she explains, emerged as a unique teacher training tool from the digital posts that her students, who are online teacher-trainees, made in response to their online discussion prompts and available threads. Thus, the online course archive itself becomes a "constructive hypertext" for professional development and training in the new skills that online educators require. Through both quantitative and qualitative analysis of a course archive, Cargile Cook further demonstrates the usefulness of conceptualizing archives in this manner and then the ways in which such archives can be used for training purposes for online educators.

CONCLUSION

This special issue addresses global perspectives on online teaching and learning and training, instructor self-selection and readiness, and the professional develop-

ment implications demonstrated in a single case study of course archives. Collectively, St. Amant, Meloncon, and Cargile Cook's three articles support the effort to investigate the nature of online teaching and learning and to embrace the uniqueness of online interaction from training and professional development perspectives. Each article considers the theoretically relevant frameworks and pedagogical strategies that online trainers and instructors can employ as they engage in the business of online teaching and learning. The authors have also offered insights into new ways of theorizing online teaching and learning and the professional development associated with it. We see these articles as intriguing and helpful starting points that warrant further empirical as well as theoretical investigation and continued discussion among professional technical communicators and rhetoric and writing educators alike.

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