8 Best Practices for Training Instructors to Teach Online

Instructors are an integral part of teaching and learning, regardless of whether it takes place face-to-face or online. During the current crisis, many are discovering that delivering high quality teaching online requires some changes. If you are supporting instructors who are transitioning from the classroom to online, once you have a chance to come up for air we have eight strategies for effective training.

1. Work from the ground up to obtain educator buy-in.

- The success of any type of professional development program depends partially on the buy-in from participants. They need to believe this is being done 'for them' not 'to them'.
- Due to the relatively new nature of online learning, instructors might have misconceptions (e.g. about the level of rigor of online learning). To avoid this, clearly communicate important points about the transition. Using technology isn't just an emergency response, it will be a method used in the future.
- As well as referring to research when developing an online training program, ask for feedback from instructors, and make sure it's taken into account. You could send a survey, or conduct focus groups.

2. Offer high quality professional development opportunities.

Whether you are training instructors that will be teaching online or face-to-face, the same rules apply. High quality professional development is training that is:

- Ongoing
- Reflective
- Supports the construction of a professional learning community
- Based in classroom practice
- Grounded in current research
- Tailored to instructors' specific needs and embedded in their daily lives
- Diverse, offering a wide range of learning activities

3. Give instructors authentic learning experiences.

- Run the training on the same platforms that instructors will be using in their class so they can experience roadblocks (e.g. signing onto the platform) or challenges (e.g. navigating content) that students might experience.
- Use content that instructors will use in real life. For example, if an instructor will be teaching Science, learning that content during training will help the instructor become familiar with the types of resources or labs available online and how to navigate them.

4. Differentiate instruction and use a wide array of resources unique to online learning.

- When instructors transition to an online environment they will likely introduce new and different types of instruction, and these strategies should be modelled during the training.
- For example, training should include both synchronous and asynchronous discussion, as well as the use of various resources including web-cameras, videos, instant messaging, and online whiteboards.

5. Online teaching pedagogy and content are important, but an online teacher training program should also focus on soft skills.

- In addition to online pedagogy and subject matter, instructors need to be competent in organisation, time management, and self-direction.
- A great deal of an online learning course is asynchronous and is therefore occurring at a student's pace. Teachers need to know how to best organize this mode of learning, when to be available for student inquiry, and when they are "out of class time". Conversely, instructors should also be self-directed so that they know when they are "in class time" and monitor discussion, or grade assignments. (Read more about developing these skills here.)

6. Develop a community of online instructors.

Developing a community gives instructors a support system as they are delivering their courses so they can share experiences and best practices. You can:

- Pair new instructors with mentor veteran instructors.
- Create the space for instructors to collaborate.
- Use online environment tools, such as discussion boards with questions posed by a veteran instructor, chat rooms that are monitored by faculty who trained the instructors, and/or asynchronous discussion.

7. Expect instructors to demonstrate mastery before they teach their own course.

Given that online instruction requires active, hands on learning techniques, these should be the types of activities instructors should demonstrate as an end of training assessment.

8. Train instructors to be aware of data security.

- When all information in the course is being transmitted online it becomes easy to leave data vulnerable for security breaches.

- Teachers should ask students to reduce their transmission of personally identifiable information to times when it is necessary. When transmitting files, they should be locked and/or transmitted through a secure file transfer site.
- Instructors should house student background, demographic, and identifying data in a secure file, and performance data should be transmitted privately and securely.

Source:

Smith, K. (2016). *Toward an Understanding of Training to Teach Online: A Review of the Literature.* Pearson Efficacy & Research.