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PREVIEW

FACULTY AND STAFF COLLABORATION IN DESIGNING
AN ON-LINE FOREIGN LANGUAGE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COURSE:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

Christel Helene Ortmann

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska
in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Interdepartmental Area of
Major: Administration, Curriculum, and Instruction

Under the Supervision of Professor Aleidine J. Moeller

Lincoln, Nebraska

August, 1998

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PREVIEW

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Professional Development Course: A Qualitative Case Study

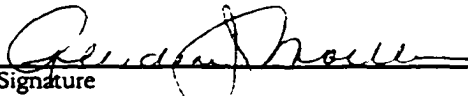
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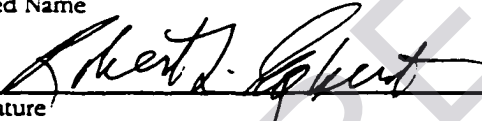
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Faculty And Staff Collaboration in Designing An On-Line
Foreign Language Professional Development Course:
A Qualitative Case Study

Christel Helene Ortmann, Ph.D.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, 1998

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The German language professional organizations responded to the national standards movement with the development of a sequence of on-line courses designed to provide in-service teachers with the possibility of additional professional training. The on-line course modules provide training in language skill areas, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Furthermore, they also offer training in the application of the latest developments in pedagogy and of technology in German foreign language classrooms.

A group of distinguished professors in the field of German studies joined together in a team in 1993 to begin the process of designing these on-line courses. The on-line courses will in the near future provide the core curriculum for a M.Ed. degree offered via the internet. In

1996, major funds were acquired and the team was now organized in hierarchies reaching from the national board of directors to local author teams responsible for the creation of individual modules.

This research is an in-depth qualitative case study exploring the dynamics of one local author team, consisting of two content specialists, professors, and two technologists in their attempt to create the course module for the area of listening and instructional improvement. The study is based on evidence collected from multiple sources, such as course documents, minutes of meetings, observations, and interviews. The case covers the time period of the year 1997. The data showed evidence of themes and lead itself to assertions about the dynamics of a team-effort in the process of designing a course.

The themes provide data on how the background and specialization, the preferred work-mode, and the influence of the national board of directors impacted the local collaboration. Although this research only examines one specific case, the findings with recommendations for the design of further courses like these can provide important feedback to other designers of distance courses.

Acknowledgments

Although it did seem at times impossible to imagine, I am now arriving at the time of the completion of my doctoral program and research project and want to take the opportunity to thank and share credit for my dissertation.

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PREVIEW

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1. Introduction

1.1. Problem

Institutions of higher education in the United States (U.S.) made, in the recent past, an effort to implement technology into their curriculum across disciplines (Filipczak, 1995; Gilbert, 1995; Green, 1996). Green (1996) stated: "The proportion of college courses using some form of information technology resource rose significantly between 1994 and 1995, increasing by at least one-half and in some cases doubling" (p. 26). This dramatic curricular change was largely initiated by higher education administrations (McHenry & Bozik, 1995). However, despite a push for the implementation of distance education, organized efforts in faculty training are rare. Hansen et al. (1997) noted:

Distance teaching places increased demands on instructor's time. Distance teachers need additional planning time and must adapt current materials or develop new ones with a new set of criteria . . . in addition to appropriate training, it is crucial for professional distance learning educators to receive administrative support that reflects a belief in the importance of efforts to become effective teachers at a distance . . . this could be accomplished by salary and time allocations, and by including teachers in the areas of planning and decision making. Providing faculty with well maintained equipment and opportunities to become familiar with technology, and staff development are equally important. (p. 38)

Gilbert (1995) stated: "some institutions are leaping at distance education . . . without taking the necessary time to . . . prepare faculty for effective participation"

(p. 17). McHenry and Bozik (1995) reported, "teaching on the system requires skill and adaptation by the teacher"

(p. 368). It seemed valid that educators played a significant

role in the "technological revolution." Comeaux (1995) suggested: "It is essential that we, as educators, become part of the decision-making processes that will guide the fiber optic revolution" (p. 353).

Throughout the academic disciplines, technology assisted learning had become an especially well discussed issue in the field of second language acquisition (Davey, Grade, & Fox, 1995; Davi, 1988; Gallego, 1992; Ganszaug, Hult, & Konttinen, 1994; Hansen, 1995; White, 1994; White, 1995). One of the main reasons for the special interest of foreign language educators in distance learning was that technology made it possible to bring the target culture and language into the classroom and closer to the students. Batson and Bass (1996) stated: "As students begin to 'surf the Web,' connecting to nearly live images . . . the four walls of the classroom may be breaking down more quickly than teachers had thought they would" (p. 45). The trend of utilizing technology was reflected in the major publications of professional foreign language organizations, such as the National Standards for the Teaching of Foreign Languages and the state frameworks. These documents recommended the implementation of technology in K-16 classrooms. The Standards for Foreign Language Learning: Preparing for the 21st Century recommended that teachers incorporate into their teaching practice a wide variety of print and electronic media materials. The same publication also recommended they ". . . use technology to deliver or support instruction,

student feedback, and assessment" (p. 22). For evidence of adequate teacher performance, the Standards recommended: ". . . examples of the use of technology in managing and monitoring student learning" (p. 23)¹.

Using technology was, however, a skill which many teachers did not acquire during their professional training (White, 1994). Batson and Bass (1995) suggested a significant resistance on the part of teachers to infusing computer technology into teaching. This could be explained by a lack of training. Faced with the challenge of implementing technology into their teaching curriculum, teacher demand for continuing teacher education utilizing technology rose steadily (Hirumi & Harmon, 1994; Knapczyk & Rodes, 1995).

Higher education faculty who were concerned with training teachers were generally specialists in one area of a discipline. They were typically not trained in applying technology to its fullest benefit into their courses (Filipczak, 1995; White, 1994). Ganszauge et al. (1994) stated: "Teachers who have no prior experience with the instrument need guidance in the potential applications of the computer in the language classroom" (p. 160). The benefits of utilizing technology in teacher education contexts were widely acknowledged (Hansen, 1995). Many teacher educators

¹In this study, the terms technology and distance-education refer to computer-assisted instruction and not to video, telephone, or language-lab applications.

were applying technology in some ways, if only to e-mail with students or to identify links on the world-wide-web (WWW). These efforts did not necessarily prepare their students for all of the possibilities that computer assisted instruction might provide. Gilbert (1995) reported: "Many faculty members are reluctant to move beyond word processing" (p. 14). Davey and colleagues (1995) stated: "It is important that . . . authors and teachers do not fall back into the trap of setting the same dull old tasks" (p. 32). Instructing technology-based teacher training courses posed a challenge to faculty that needed to be met with confidence.

In order to meet the student need for technology assisted instruction, new ways were being developed to not only change the course delivery but also the pedagogy that required different approaches to language instruction and professional teacher development. Jakobsdottir and Hooper (1995) charged, "One of the challenges for instructional designers, therefore, is to determine how technology can be used effectively for foreign language instruction" (p. 44). Designing and implementing a course such as a foreign language professional development course taught via technology, however, was an endeavor which required the cooperation of content and technology specialists. Hirumi and Harmon (1994) suggested that distance learning be viewed: ". . . as a system, a set of interrelated components that must work together to achieve a common purpose" (p. 266). For the creation of workable course designs, different fields of

expertise were needed in foreign language, in technology-pedagogy, and in technology, since many faculty did not yet possess the needed technological skills. This new form of cooperation posed a new team dimension in teaching and curriculum development, replacing the traditional academic autonomy of individual instructor-specialists. The Distance Education Review of Literature (1997) suggested:

In traditional teaching, not many people were involved in the teaching process . . . (but the) successful operation of a distance education enterprise requires the knowledge, talents, and cooperation of a great number of individuals . . . teachers may work in production teams in which each member has an interest in what the other member is doing. With multiple learning materials being produced and many people collaborating in their production, the need to plan and coordinate staff activity is essential. Instructors, students, and support staff must work in concert to produce quality distance education programming. Due to the interconnected nature of distance education enterprises, each individual is considered a valuable and integral member of the distance education team.

The development team should include content specialists (academics), instructional designers, writers and editors, media specialists, and specialists in adult learner behavior and curriculum development. An interactive team approach can minimize the production-line concept, in which people add bits and pieces to courses as they come down to the line. Intellectual property rights of faculty and the question of faculty royalties need to be addressed. Copyright policies must be fashioned.

Collaboration in distance learning was not just necessary among the course designers but also for the pedagogy itself, as it related knowledge to students.

(Professional Standards for Teachers of Foreign Languages; Gilbert, 1995; Hansen, 1995). Publications addressed the influence of technology on instructional practices and the new roles of learner and instructor (Brush, Knapczyk, & Hubbard, 1993; Davis, 1988; White, 1995). Filipczak (1995) stated: "To make distance learning or any kind of learning more effective . . . you really have to change the nature of the instructional process" (p. 113). Studies reported unanticipated problems as part of the outcome of distance learning courses (McHenry & Bozik, 1995). Brush and colleagues (1993) reported that their course objectives were not met: "There were areas where the system could be improved . . . the program staff decided to revise the system in order to facilitate the exchange of ideas and feedback between the instructor and teachers, and among the cohort group of teachers" (p. 41). McHenry and Bozik (1995) also reported problems in the areas of deadline scheduling, material distribution, and technology (p. 368). Jakobsdottir and Hooper (1995) stated, "Although efforts have been made to enrich foreign language instruction with technology for several years, many endeavors have been unsuccessful" (p. 43). The lack of successful implementation was often attributed to a lack in faculty preparation for this new mode of instruction. The problem of adequate faculty training was addressed by Maushak (1997) who stated that until professors have adequate access to technology and could develop their own comfort level, few would model effective uses of

technology in their classes. Heath (1996) found in her study that preparation time in the utilization of technology was strongly correlated to the outcome of the course. Barnett (1996) found that faculty were concerned and frustrated by persistent technical problems and a lack of administrative incentives. Goodwin (1994) recommended a review of faculty salary in terms of the workload involved in creating an on-line course. Clark (1994) expressed that it was imperative that more qualified support be provided for faculty who create a distance education course.

The literature review corroborated the complexity of designing distance education courses. No study to date has explored the experience of the collaboration process between faculty and technologists designing a distance course. Several studies reported on issues of institutional support, the need for faculty training, distance learning programs, student perceptions, and technology itself. These studies seemed to operate on the assumption that faculty were conducting the course design by themselves, after having received sufficient training in technology. A review of the literature revealed the need for institutional support and faculty training and confirmed that new strategies seemed to be needed to collaborate across disciplines, to find time and resources to create a sound course and to create a different pedagogical approach.

This study, therefore, adds to the body of research by providing educators with an in-depth view of the dynamics

involved in the development of such a course. The study explores the collaboration efforts of a team who developed a distance course on the skill of listening and instructional planning. This course was designed as a professional development course for practicing teachers of German.

1.2. Purpose

The purpose of this single case study is to explore the collaboration experiences of two professors and two technologists in designing a professional development course taught via the internet. A qualitative case study design was used in order to provide a holistic picture of how these four individuals collaborated with each other. Triangulation procedures led to a generalization of the understanding of collaboration in course design.

PREVIEW

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

Distance learning is a current issue in the field of second language instruction. It is, therefore, imperative to conduct research and provide findings regarding the design of courses for educators who want to implement such courses. The process of collaboration between content area specialists and technicians in the design of a foreign language professional development distance education course via the internet is a relatively new area which, according to the literature review, has not yet been significantly researched. It is, therefore, difficult to identify variables for a quantitative study. Qualitative research designs are especially useful in the examination of very complex issues such as a curriculum design process. In such a study, there are a large number of variables involved, many of which cannot be foreseen at the beginning. The process holds an unknown and unidentifiable number of variables. Program development and participant perceptions are more likely to be fully captured by a qualitative design, since the very essence of program development is a fluid process. This study concerns itself with the examination of a process and not with the outcome of the program development. Since this study is concerned with the strategies which are employed by the creators of the course, a descriptive and narrative reflection of their experiences, a quantitative research design is not suitable. A qualitative study will enhance the significance of the

research for the audience, individuals interested in the same kind of issues.

As previously stated, this study focuses on the process rather than the outcome. A process is, by nature, unpredictable and unforeseeable. This unpredictability makes it difficult to identify variables and create appropriate measurement scales, as required by a quantitative research design, prior to the process. By becoming part of the creation process as a participant observer, the researcher had the opportunity to participate in the experience with the other parties by conducting interviews, observations, etc. Therefore, the dynamics of the process could be observed and comprehended in-depth.

Creating traditional measurement scales, such as a Likert scale, requires making assumptions beforehand about the participants' experiences. This does not leave room for them to describe their concerns and strategies, since many issues only emerge during the process. Detailed interviews, observations and participant journals will help to paint a rich and detailed picture of the experience, as perceived by the participants.

2.2. Specific Case Study Design

This research does not attempt to generalize the findings to the entire population of instructors preparing distance learning courses. The focus of this study is one particular case, bound by time and place, as required for case study research design (Stake, 1995). The collaboration