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## Training online faculty: a phenomenology study

Haijun Kang

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## **Training Online Faculty: A Phenomenology Study**

### **Abstract**

Literature on training faculty to teach online still dwells on the issues explored a decade ago. To make a substantial move in this area, it is necessary to re-evaluate the essence of training in the context of producing qualified online faculty to teach quality online courses. Employing a phenomenological approach, this study examines seven online faculty's lived training experiences and observed that there existed incidental factors that could affect the quality of training. Further data analysis indicated that it was the different levels of understandings of "training" between different parties that led to variations in the quality of training. "There is a whole [training] world that's going on out there ... I'm just not interested... because that's not my world," said one research participant. Therefore, different parties involved in training online faculty should look at training from a systems approach and view training as an opportunity (1) to transfer knowledge and skills necessary for conducting quality online instruction; (2) to remove barriers preventing faculty from teaching online; and (3) to transform traditional faculty members into highly qualified online faculty.

**Keywords:** online faculty, training quality, phenomenology study

### **INTRODUCTION**

In 2009, President Barack Obama articulated a goal of American education institutions leading the world in college degrees by 2020 and emphasized that online education was one of the major ways of achieving this goal (Obama, 2009). A two-year study jointly conducted by the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) and Alfred P. Sloan Foundation indicates that online education is becoming a strategic asset of most educational institutions (McCarthy & Samors, 2009). Nevertheless, the rapid growth of the online learning industry has been met with the relatively slow growth of online faculty population (Allen and Seaman, 2007). Employing a phenomenology approach, this study focuses on the issues of training, one way of helping this online faculty population to grow.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

As more and more educational institutions are embracing online learning, faculty receive continuous pressure from administrators to become engaged in the design and delivery of online instruction. Some faculty welcome this new adventure but many others do not. Online learning brings a host of new and existing faculty issues to the forefront. “Without well-trained and equitably rewarded distance education faculty, there would be no [distance education] programs” (Olcott & Wright, 1995, p. 11). Therefore, decision makers need to recognize the strategic value of identifying and removing the challenges that distance education faculty must face.

If training is used to its full potential, it can become a critical component in the process of solving the issues confronting distance education faculty. An examination of several educational institutions taking the lead on online learning, in combination with a review of literature on distance education faculty issues, reaffirm this assumption. The University of Central Florida, for example, has developed a comprehensive, tiered professional development plan for their online faculty. The Pennsylvania State University has provided distance education faculty training programs since 1995. The California State University at Fresno offers an eScholars training program through their Digital Campus to faculty teaching online. A decade ago, NCES’s report indicated that sixty percent of higher education institutions offering distance education courses had designed training programs to prepare their faculty (1998). They have not released an updated report on this subject since then. But it is not logical to see a decrease in the number of online faculty training programs along with the growth of institutions engaged in online education. In online education institutions where a well-developed plan for faculty training has been instituted, faculty are very receptive and

even eager to transfer their courses online (Grove, Strudler, & Odell, 2004; Tallen-Runnels et al., 2006).

Based on over two hundred interviews at forty-five public institutions offering online education and close to eleven thousand responses to a national faculty survey, the APLU-Sloan National Commission on Online Learning's reports indicate that there is a lot of room for improvement with regards to online faculty training and development (McCarthy & Samors, 2009, Wilson, Mayadas, Hancock & Seaman, 2008). One aspect of training that has not been mentioned in most published research studies on online faculty issues but is pinpointed in McCarthy and Samors' report is that well-developed faculty training programs help "Advancing institutional interests [in online learning] and building a sense of community among online faculty" (2009, p. 28). This makes the author wonder: What other potential benefits might trainings offer beyond building interest and community?

The purpose of this study is to explore the potentials of training through online faculty's own eyes – A phenomenology approach. In other words, the author wanted to understand the essence of training online faculty through online faculty's own lived experiences. Because faculty live with the dynamic nature of the technology and support needed to deliver effective online instruction, they are the best source of advice and information on what kind of training works and what kind of training does not work. Engaging online faculty in dialogue about the quality, support, and overall role that training plays in their professional development helps uncover some of the other potentials of training that have yet to be fully recognized.

## **DEFINITION OF TRAINING**

Training, according to the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1988), is the act of training or being trained. Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary has two entries for training: (1) Training is "the act, process, or method of one that trains and the skill, knowledge, or experience acquired by one that trains; and (2) Training is "the state of being trained".

Combining these two definitions, it becomes clear that training has the following common features:

- It is a two-way process;
- It involves two parties: Trainer(s) and trainee(s);
- The act, process, or method each party implements has direct impact on the training outcomes; and
- The skill, knowledge, or experience each party contributes has direct impact on the training outcomes as well.

The Longman Dictionary emphasizes the equally important roles that the two parties play in the two-way training process: The act of being trained is as important as the act of training others. In comparison, Merriam-Webster emphasizes the act of training and the competency of trainer, which implies that the act of being trained is more likely a passive one. This slight difference reflects different understandings of "training." Therefore, for the purpose of this study, it is necessary to have an operational definition for "training".

In this study, training refers to the act, process, or method that has both parties (trainers and trainees) equally involved; therefore, training requires skill, knowledge, and experience from both parties (trainers and trainees). This operational definition has two primary elements: (1) Trainers include people who initiate, design, deliver, or evaluate training programs. Trainees refer to people who attend training with the expectation of gaining something. (2) Training is a two-way process, not a one-way indoctrination. Both parties (trainer and trainee) are expected to be equally and actively involved in the training process (this means that there is

possibility that in some situations trainees may switch roles with the trainers). Therefore, the terms “trainer” and “trainee” used in this study are not to label a person as a “permanent” trainer or trainee in a training process. Instead, these two terms are used to distinguish the activities that people conduct during training.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

To achieve the goal of this study, the author reviewed two groups of literature: Online faculty’s professional development and training of online faculty. A review of the literature on online faculty’s professional development helps to set up a base for this study. A review of the studies conducted in the area of training online faculty indicates the current status of the area and sheds light on the roles that training has played in online faculty’s professional development.

### **Online Faculty’s Professional Development**

Online faculty professional development is a classic research topic that has been studied for over a decade. Dillion and Walsh (1992) reviewed several studies on faculty’s professional development and suggested that faculty professional development was mainly comprised of faculty characteristics, rewards and incentives, institutional leaderships, linkage and observability (for example, training, trialability, and networking), intellectual property, and so on. The significance of these faculty professional development components to quality online education is reemphasized in the 21st century studies, such as Wolcott (2003). Olcott and Wright studied the barriers to faculty’s participation in distance education in 1995 and proposed an institutional support framework to nurture distance education faculty’s professional development. Many of the barriers they identified were recaptured by Dooley and

Magill (2002). Other studies include Lynch and Corry's (1998) research on distance education faculty's recruitment, training, and compensation. They suggested a systematic approach to help to improve faculty's professional development. A decade later, Sixl-Daniell, Williams, and Wong (2006) from the Universitas 21 consortium shared a model instituted by their 17 member universities to recruit, train and retain online adjunct faculty. They indicate that the model was the key for them to assure quality online education.

A common theme shared by all of these and other studies is that faculty's buy-in to online education depends upon the promotion of an institution-wide synergistic environment conducive to educational innovation. Training is a strategic component of this type of innovative, educational environment.

## **Training Online Faculty**

### *Training needs*

Wilson (1998) surveyed 77 online faculty about their perceptions of, practices in and concerns about teaching online courses. These faculty articulated 13 concerns that they experienced while teaching courses online, most of which are still an issue in today's online education (Tallent-Runnels et. al, 2006; Hinson and LaPrairie, 2005). These concerns include: sufficient time to develop and maintain course material, technical support, administrative support, technical training, and so on. Wilson emphasized that technical support and technical training needed more attention because "65% of the instructors rated technical support a major problem ... 61% of the instructors surveyed received no training in web-course development" (1998). Twelve years have passed but studies still show that many faculty do not receive adequate training (Pagliari, Batts & McFadden, 2009; Pankowski, 2004). As online education

grows, new issues emerge, such as copyright and intellectual property (Levy, 2003) and cyber-harassment in or as a result of an online course (Vance, 2010). To adequately address both old and emerging issues, training needs should be reassessed. Not accurately responding to the actual training needs will soon put training programs on the shelf (Wilson, 1998). Irani and Telg (2002) uncovered three common themes from participants' responses to a request to identify the issues most critical to attracting faculty to attend training: Instructional methods, planning, and faculty motivation.

### *Training format and content*

NCES (1998) reported that existing training programs mainly focused on: Technologies competency, curriculum development, and teaching methods. Hitch & Hirsch's study in 2001 and Puzziferro and Shelton's in 2009 echo this finding. Clay (1999) listed eight possible training formats and recommended that an ideal training program would include opportunities for at least four of them to achieve optimal training outcomes. She also developed two lists of training topics – one for beginning faculty and the other one for the experienced. Irani and Telg (2002) surveyed training specialists from 14 land-grant institutions and found that most training programs they offered were voluntary-based and consisted of a variety of delivery formats. They also found out that many individual colleges delivered their own programs even though the universities had training centers. Their study showed that exposing faculty to more distance teaching methods was a major content of their training programs. Gunawardena (1990) and Beavers (2010) both highlighted the importance of training faculty not only in the use of technology but also in the principles of online learning theory because

online education is transferring faculty's traditional role as instructor to a new role as facilitator.

### *Other voices on training online faculty*

Moore (2006), the editor of the *American Journal of Distance Education*, reflected on the current status of training faculty to teach online and proposed two possible improvement models: institution-centered and faculty-centered. The one that has not been widely discussed in most literature is the faculty-centered model. Rather than second-guessing what faculty needed, he suggested institutions encourage "self-managed professional development" (p.62). Under this model, faculty would be given an opportunity to self-manage institutional funding of their self-development. Faculty may use the money to attend trainings outside of the institution, to attend conferences, to seek internships at other institutions, etc. – as long as they can justify that these events outweigh those trainings offered within the institution with regards to preparing them to teach online. Wolf's study (2006) indicated that successful faculty could be the best teachers of other faculty, and he suggests that having them provide training would yield more successful training experience. Puzziferro and Shelton (2009) contended that the focus should be shifted from "training" to "developing" online faculty and make them lifelong learners who believe in active learning and who create technology mediated active learning environments in the context of online courses.

Two major themes emerged from the literature review. First, many research findings published in recent years echo those published in the past decade. This implies that we have yet to find the best-fitting solutions to those frequently cited training issues. Second, while most studies on training faculty to teach online fall into two categories (Training needs; Training

format and content), there are scholars who have made efforts to push the boundaries of our traditional understanding of training. This study engages these two themes by employing a phenomenology approach – Because faculty live with the dynamic nature of the technology and support needed to deliver online instruction, this study explores the essence of training through faculty's eyes.

## METHOD

A phenomenological research method was selected for this study because the structure and content of one's lived experiences tell people how to make sense of these lived experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). This research method is distinct from other research methods in that it is “the application of *logos* (language and thoughtfulness) to a phenomenon (an aspect of lived experience), to what shows itself precisely as it shows itself” (van Manen, 1997, p. 33). Online faculty were asked to reveal the “quintessential meaning” of their lived training experiences through “dialogue and reflection” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 72). Examining online faculty's lived training experiences helps to understand the actual meaning, nature and quality of the training they attended.

Due to the nature of qualitative research design, this study was conducted at a north-eastern U.S. university. Two criteria were used in recruiting research participants – Research participants needed to have online teaching experience and experiences of attending training(s) on online teaching. Faculty who no longer taught online courses when this study was conducted were excluded. Seven online faculty agreed to participate in this study and signed the consent form. These participants included five males and two females. They were all

employed at a north-eastern U.S. university, were teaching courses via Internet, and had attended different training programs focusing on online instruction.

In-depth interviews were performed in person and, if not, by videoconference. The interview was semi-structured and all interviews were digitally recorded and saved on the researcher's computer. Semi-structured interviews helped to filter out after-thought interpretations and to guide interviewees to describe their lived experiences. The interviews were ranged from one to one and a half hours in length. The recorded interviews were then transcribed and the accuracy double-checked. Two onsite observations were conducted because "Observation is fundamental to all qualitative inquiry" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 136). The setting for the observation was the training providers' video conference room. Observation data were collected using note-taking skills.

In this qualitative study, the researcher served as the major research instrument. The researcher's preconceptions and presuppositions, if not handled appropriately, would hurt the validity and reliability of the research results. Therefore, a bracketing strategy was employed in the data collection and analysis processes. Bracketing technique is defined as examining and suspending the researcher's own beliefs to keep him/her as open as possible to what research participants want to share (Polkinghorne, 1989). To bracket the researcher's potential bias, a semi-structured interview protocol comprising of non-leading and open-ended questions was used and an accuracy check step was created after the data were transcribed and interpreted to make sure that research subjects' lived training experiences had been correctly and accurately transcribed and interpreted.

In performing the data analysis, the researcher went through the process of “sorting, categorizing, grouping, and regrouping” (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 172) the structure and content of participants’ lived experiences. The analysis began by reading each individual research participant’s transcript multiple times in its entirety to obtain an overall feeling of each participant’s lived training experiences, and every sentence was then carefully examined for possible meanings, implications and connections. Where a sentence was found to have more than one possible way of understanding, researcher participants were contacted for further explanation and clarification on that specific sentence. After all data had been analyzed and synthesized, the data analysis was sent back to the participants for review and their feedbacks and comments were included in the final report. The qualitative software NVivo 8.0 was used in the data analysis.

## **FINDINGS**

Understanding the data was a very challenging process. At the early stage of data analysis, each individual participant’s training experiences appeared to be distinct. Yet, after the interview transcripts had been examined multiple times, those differences became superficial and the underlying themes were uncovered.

### **A Glance at their Training Experiences**

The seven research participants’ online teaching experiences ranged from one to ten years. They had all attended different types of training programs to improve their online teaching. The content of the training programs they had attended fell into two categories: Technology and online teaching pedagogy. This result echoes other researchers’ findings, such as Dillion and Walsh (1992), Irani and Telg (2002), and Gunawardena (1990). Technology

training covered topics such as learning the different tools available in the Learning Management System used to deliver their courses, learning different software (e.g. Dreamweaver, Photoshop, Flash, etc.) to produce interactive lesson content, learning how to incorporate social media (e.g. wikis, blog, twitter, podcasting, etc.) into online courses, etc. The major delivery formats for technology training were one-on-one, web-based and/or group-based. Half of the participants had also taken some training on teaching pedagogy in the forms of symposia and workshops. In those symposia and workshops, online faculty from different departments gathered together to share their online teaching experiences and strategies. The data from the two on-site observations led to the same conclusions. All these indicate that the participants of this study are no different from other online faculty and the training programs they received are no different from the ones received by other online faculty.

### **Don't Waste My Time If You Don't Know What I Need**

Training needs to be aligned with trainees' needs. It sounds like a cliché, but it is actually given less serious thoughts and is often ignored in education institutions. Research participants indicated that good training should be able to satisfy their interest. In other words, online faculty's needs must be used as the benchmarks in designing, developing, and implementing training programs. If not, online faculty are less likely want to attend these kinds of training because, as one participant said, it is just a "waste of time". Another research participant made this very clear that "There is a whole [training] world that's going on out there . . . is driven by economics. It's not pedagogical. It's a way to generate money. . . . I'm just not interested. . . . because that's not my world." This seemingly very general comment actually

conveyed two messages that were uncovered after a follow-up with this research participant, which helped to provide a link to connect different training experiences participants described.

The first message was that the selection of training content should reflect online faculty's needs. Based on participants' discussion of their training needs, two large categories of training content were identified: The need for technology skills and the need for online teaching skills/pedagogy. One participant said, "Training is anything that either gives me a new skill or improves the skills that I already have." The challenge raised here is that how can trainers learn about their targeting online faculty's skill competencies. Participants of this study indicated that once in a while they would receive an email survey asking about the kind of training they would like to attend but none asked them about their skill competences. They said those surveys would have been an effective way of identifying their training needs had they been designed "appropriately." When asked to explain what they meant by "appropriately," they said that the surveys they received mainly consisted of the training items already "predetermined" by the trainer, and all they needed to do with the surveys were to check "Yes, I'd like to attend" or "No, I don't want to attend" options. They said that some surveys did have open-ended question(s) asking for other training needs online faculty might have but "...I really don't think they will seriously consider what you put there...because their minds are already set on the things they want to do..." one participant said.

The second message indicated that good training content must be delivered in a pedagogically sound format. Undoubtedly, the purpose of training is to help faculty be more successful in distance teaching. If faculty feel that attending training would require a disproportionate input of time and energy with low return or if they sense that the training has

“highly specified and predetermined curriculum” and trainers ignore their learning preferences and learning curve, they will show no interest in attending the training. As expressed by one participant, “To me, if it’s technology, and it’s not hands-on, it’s [a] waste of time to offer. You are wasting your time to give it to me and waste of my time to sit through it and listen to you ... So, normally, if someone tells me how to do something on Blackboard, when I walk out of the session, I will throw away the handouts and forget about it...” Hence, trainers should be competent enough to offer training in different formats tailored to individual faculty’s interests and preferences. For example, how long should the training be; should a session of hands-on practice be included; should both synchronous (face-to-face) and asynchronous formats be considered, would the training be more effective if delivered one-on-one or to a group, etc. Answers to these questions can only be found through training needs analysis.

### **Training Is Absolutely, Positively Critical but Some Trainings Are Boring**

All research participants sent the same message that they, as online faculty, benefited a lot from training. Though attending training was not mandatory at their institution, all but one research participant had begun to seek and attend different trainings when they knew they were going to teach online. The one participant who did not attend any training before teaching her first online course explained that she did not know that she was going to teach an online course until she was called upon by her department. She said, “I would have participated in several training programs on distance education, if I knew in advance that they [were] gonna ask me to teach distance education courses.....” She ended up offering the course online as required and received special one-on-one assistance from the institution’s technology support center.

When asked about whether they had good or bad training experiences, their responses were both positive and negative. They were very positive about training outcomes – improvement of technology skills and online teaching pedagogy. As one participant said enthusiastically, "But, but, clearly, the training was absolutely, positively, essentially critical. If I had not had the Blackboard training I've had, I can tell you right now, I would not be using Blackboard to this date." However, they also expressed some concerns. They were not very happy with the way some trainers delivered their training. One participant recalled a bad training experience he had: "It [The training] was very long and it was very drown out. .... I almost fell asleep... and the presenter was very boring..." All research participants indicated that they needed "hands-on" practice and more time to interact with both trainers and other trainees to have better digestion of the training contents.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings indicate that online faculty consider training as an indispensable factor that assures successful online instruction and online faculty's major training needs include technology skills and online teaching pedagogy. Though participants' training stories showed that they did receive training in these two categories, the qualities of the trainings they received varied greatly. Based on their stories, it is reasonable to assume that there are many incidental factors that have contributed to variation of the quality of different training programs. If training content happened to be of interest to the online faculty and the trainer happened to deliver the training in a format that favored the online faculty's learning preferences and learning curves, the quality of the training program would be high and the online faculty would be happy about the training experience. However, what if some of these incidental factors are

missing? Providing a detailed list of incidental factors negatively affecting training outcomes is beyond the scope of this paper but would be an interesting research topic for a separate study. It is clear that we need to eliminate or control these incidental factors in order to produce more robust training programs.

To better understand the impact of these incidental factors, it is necessary to review some of the findings that reflect online faculty's frustration and dissatisfaction with training. One participant complained that he was not interested in several trainings he attended because these were not "part of his world"; several participants were not satisfied with some of their training experiences because those trainings were delivered to them with a "highly specified and predetermined curriculum"; and another participant criticized the technology training as not being hands-on. All of these complaints and unsatisfactory comments focus on the methods used to deliver training. Needless to say, the way in which training is delivered is decided by the nature of the training content. But whether the matching of certain training content with certain delivery format is appropriate or not depends on both trainers and trainees' understanding. Taking technology skills as an example, some faculty prefer "hands-on" training; some prefer one-on-one to group-based; and others would like to read a technology guide by themselves and be trained on the pedagogies behind the technologies so that they may customize the technology to their specific teaching situations. We may have trainers who approach training the same way as these faculty do.

The diversified backgrounds of the trainer population muddy the water more. This study, as well as published literature (including NCES, 1998), indicates that trainer population consists of instructional designers, technology people, distance teaching consultants, and

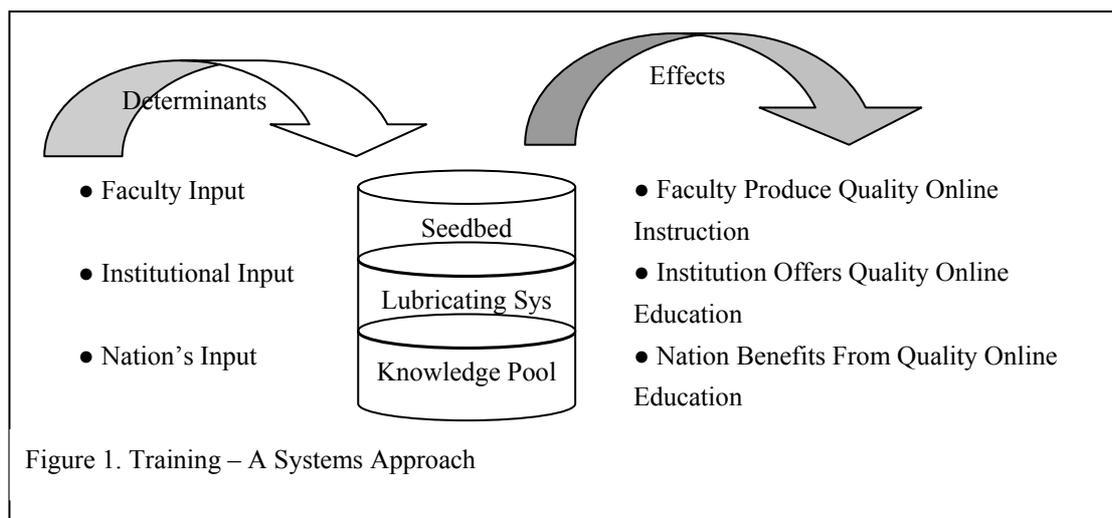
teaching assistants. Many of them have received education and/or professional training on how to conduct needs assessment and how to deliver effective training but many have not.

Regardless, their understanding of what training should look like affects what training content they would choose and in what format they would deliver the training. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume that online faculty's dissatisfaction with many training programs is largely due to understanding discrepancies in training between themselves and trainers.

If discrepancies in understanding of training can be removed, many of the issues in the training of online faculty may be dealt with easily. There are at least two ways to reduce this discrepancy. One is to develop training content in different formats to meet different online faculty's personal needs. This will obviously increase training cost. The second is to make a special effort to align different parties' understandings — a much more cost-effective method with high return on investment. For example, if both trainers and trainees understand that training is not just a way to become familiar with how to use certain technologies but also a way to communicate with the organization he/she is committed to, a way to contribute to the implementation of organizational strategies and policies that benefit not only the individual but also the organization and the nation, he/she might consider the collective interest over their own interest. If this happens, training of online faculty will no longer be a passive reaction to rapid changes in the external environment. It will be an active process whereby institution and faculty work collaboratively on the issues confronting online faculty.

Understanding the essence of training is an evolving process. The perspective of Levis, the founding editor of *International Journal of Training and Development*, fits today's situation best. Levis (1997) believes that training is a system that has its own organization, strategy,

policy and practice. All of these features come together to make training an integrative body that contributes to the growth of a person, the growth of a learning organization and the booming of a civilized nation. This system mediates in the relationship between training and performance. Comparing current status of training faculty to teach online with the conceptual framework Levis depicted in his *Editorial* for the first issue of *International Journal of Training and Development*, it is easy to see that the area of training online faculty is still only partially developed: Train faculty to use different technologies and different teaching methods to deliver online instruction. Though training faculty in these two areas is important with regards to the improvement of online instruction, it is not all that training can offer. According to Levis, training can also help to strengthen the commitment of individual faculty to educational institution and the nation's performances. Discrepancies in understanding of "training", as well as the lack of attention to institution and nation's performances, have led to the separation of individual and organizational goals and made the training system a factory that produces teaching machines only. Levis said that "There appears to be little research about training organisation, strategy and policy at the micro level. In particular, there seems to be no clear explanation of what influences training strategy nor any exploration for a relationship between training strategy and organisational performance" (p 4). This comment was made on the broad field of training and development but it is particularly relevant to the current challenges we, trainers of online faculty, are confronting. Therefore, it is suggested that all parties involved in training of online faculty should share the following three fundamental understandings of training that are illustrated in Figure 1.



### **The Training System Should Be a Knowledge pool**

Training provides individual faculty an opportunity to develop vocational knowledge, which is “historically, culturally, and situationally constituted” and can not be replaced by a traditional form of education (Billett, 2002, p. 27). Training provides an entire picture of the work and specific vocational skills and knowledge, helps faculty to contextualize what they have learned from formal education, and helps faculty update their obsolescent technical skills and acquire expertise in new topics so as to face daily rapid changes in time (Bagnasco et al, 2003).

### **The Training System Should Serve As a Lubricating System**

As a lubricant, training can reduce various conflicts between the distance education institutions and their faculty by providing a place for both sides to talk and negotiate. For example, studies reported that faculty’s participation and sustaining interest in distance education have been compromised by barriers from administrative, economic, technological, learner support, etc. (Brooks, 2009; Clark, 1993). Training can provide a pedagogical situation in which it becomes possible for both sides to understand more clearly “how [faculty and institution’s] needs are constituted, whose interested are served, and in what ways they emerge

in the context of their everyday lives” (as cited in Gouthro, 2002, p. 343). Doing so during training, institutions and faculty can negotiate their interests to reduce barriers that intimate both parties’ participation in and commitment to distance education.

### **The Training System Should Function As a Seedbed**

The training system should function as a seedbed that triggers faculty’s transformation from traditional teacher to online faculty. Training can help faculty develop the capacities that enable them to transfer their experience from brick-based context to technology-based context and to make faculty’s practice field-free. The focus of training should be shifted from “producing” to “nurturing” online faculty. The whole training process should be a process of transforming traditional faculty to online faculty in which faculty play the most active role. The intentionality in the organization of activities and support is critical to the achievement of this role transformation (Billet, 2002).

## **CONCLUSION**

Research on the training of online faculty has bogged down and there is a critical need to look at this field from a new perspective. Phenomenology research method was employed in this study because of its capability of tapping the unique nature of each online faculty’s situation. After reviewing the previous literature and critically analyzing the findings of this phenomenological study, the author indicated that the area of training online faculty is still in its middle development stage and that aligning all parties’ understanding of training is the key if we want to improve the situation significantly. Based on Levis’ training framework (1997), the author introduced a systems approach to understanding the area of training online faculty.

Although techniques such as bracketing were used in this study to remove the researcher's bias, this study's contribution to the field is still limited by the availability of resources and the employed research design. Further research is encouraged, including: (1) Duplication of this study at different educational institutions; (2) Expansion of research population to include other people who are also involved in the process of training development, such as policy makers, training designers, etc; and (3) Identification of incidental factors that are causing negative impact on training outcomes. Additionally, a meta-analysis type of study is encouraged to further develop the systems approach to training depicted in Figure 1 and to summarize good examples of instances in which different parties' understandings of training are aligned.

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