

Assessment of Educational Technology in Professional Development of Adults

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ALD 605

October 8, 2012

In my daily life, along with my regular job processes engineering changes for Ridge Tool, I have also been tasked with developing and training all of the various departments who are involved with and complete the life cycle processes for products being developed and sold under the RIDGID brand name. While developing these training programs, a major flaw in our development deals with the ability to effectively assess that the training is correct and useful for our employees. If it is not, then what would I need to do as an Instructor and Instructional Designer to change. Research on assessment is required on my part to achieve this goal.

Melissa Pierson and Arlene Borthwick wrote a compelling review regarding the assessment of educational technology professional development (ETPD). They also agree that the ability of an instructor to not only learn how well (or not well) they taught their participants is a difficult task. They realize that their participants are anxious to complete their training. At the end of a day of training, when the instructors work diligently at collecting the feedback given from the participants, they realize that the participants are asking additional questions that were not answered during the day. Focus has shifted from a gathering need to a helping need. At the same time, participants are eager to finish training and leave quickly, not wanting to complete the needed feedback the instructors ask of them. As a student at one point, I have been in the same situation as the participants who have been characterized in this writing. When the training class was over, my mind moved on to the next task that I needed to complete, whether it be personal at home or additional work for the office. I typically would complete the ratings questions, but never complete written feedback about the class or instructor.

They state that in the current century, the need for accountability has been pushed to the front of the stakeholders, whether that be the companies who pay for training of their employees or from the companies who hire the instructors. They state that there is no real information available, allowing consumers to know if the training they plan on purchasing/attending is worth the value of the instructor who teaches it. The ultimate question becomes, is this training worth my time to pay if I don't see compelling evidence that the training benefits me and my company. The question is, "What's In It For Me?" should be the question that individuals being trained should ask.

The article states that "researchers have suggested frameworks to guide the assessment of ETPD." Not only does their need to be assessment of the instructor, there also needs to be assessment of the participant/student who will use the instruction they have been trained to use.

The authors suggest an evaluation assessment model, allowing the consumers (buyers of the learning) to interpret assessment of specific training. This new pedagogy suggested is called: technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK).

“Effective evaluation of professional development is at the center of the TPACK model” (Pierson, 2010). Assessment is important in curriculum development. The instructor needs to know the three areas of this model, the content knowledge, the pedagogical knowledge, and the technological knowledge. Where the three areas overlap, there is effective assessment of technology education. Every instructor learns how to teach differently. To start with, if they do not know how to learn themselves, how can they teach others? If they do not know the content, how can they develop the training for others? If they do not know the technology, how can they show others how to properly use the technology? Only when they can do all three can there be effective assessment capabilities.

In my present position, the individual prior to me also was tasked with training as I am now. There is a vast difference in how she trained. Much to my horror, as I have been told, she did not train the individuals as completely as I have been. On a recent phone conference training session, an individual explained to me that he was trained to process the requests exactly as he explained them to me over the phone. He was not aware of any other way to complete his work. After we worked over the phone, with him clicking areas in the software that needed to be reviewed, he was not aware of the tasks that he needed to accomplish. The individual prior to me did not learn the software well enough to teach the software requirements to others.

The article continues to discuss the need in the evaluation of professional development in the fact that the stakeholders themselves need to change their culture to that of accepting learning. For the training to be effective, the student, the department, and/or the company may need to change the way they do their jobs. The organization that is paying for the training must understand they need to support the changes that are happening within their organization. The training can be sabotaged without that support.

As the instructor for these technologies, I take a risk every day by learning the new technology. I am often explaining to my students during training programs and those who call for additional help outside of class that I may not always know the answer to their question. However, that being said, if it is a question(s) about the technology they have been tasked with learning and using, I will ask and learn the answer to the question(s), allowing not only them to

learn of the answer, but allows me to incorporate the knowledge into learning initiatives that are being developed. I trust that my stakeholders, being my boss, my Vice President of Engineering, and my company, Ridge Tool Company, believe in me that I have and can learn the technology systems quickly and efficiently, and can present developed training to those who use the technology and can complete their jobs better and accurately. As the article states, “schools should develop a culture instead of a program of professional development” (Pierson, 2010), I believe that the ultimate goal of the training we are building in our company will become the culture of learning to assist in completion of work goals.

The article describes how this process may never come to be, unless researched with educators in higher education. Agreed that this process would not work for my current employment situation, nor for training that I have attended in the past as a student or have taught as the instructor. They describe a “gold standard” being when used in conjunction with classroom-based research. Even though much of the training that we have been developing for use in our company is a classroom-based style training, the training is also geared toward those whose schedules will not allow them time away from their jobs to attend training. With those individuals, how do we gather evaluation data that will allow us to understand if our training methods are working?

“Teachers will operate as interactive expert learners all the time” (Pierson, 2010). This statement refers to my ability to learn as much about the technology all the time, thus allowing me to teach the knowledge I have learned to others who may become additional teachers of the knowledge or to students who need to use the knowledge for their jobs. As the instructors, we are tasked with asking the participants what they can learn from the training, how they will use what they are learning from the training, and how can the learning be better for them.

For me and my job, the best way for me to understand if the training has paid off is when projects are completed within the expected timeframe, within budget, and the individuals who typically were the “offenders” in the past are now completing their tasks efficiently. They are completing them without having to call me or email me for help. My goal is to develop the assessments along with my training programs that will allow me and my stakeholders to seek the validity from the company’s staff who attend these trainings that time and money invested in developing the training was not wasted.

Works Cited

Pierson, M. (2010). Framing the assessment of education technology professional development in a culture of learning. *Journal of Digital Learning in Teacher Education*, 26(4), 126-131.