Chapter 9

The Case of e-Tutorials for Test Preparation for New Teachers Transitioning and Transforming into the Education Profession

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter describes the Ohio Transition to Teaching Project, which assisted adult learners pursuing an alternative license to teaching in Ohio with preparation support for the Praxis II: Principles of Learning and Teaching test. It addresses the challenges these nontraditional teachers face in becoming both “content” and “pedagogically qualified.” The case describes the rationale and process for the development of an interactive online learning community that provided electronic test preparation, virtual collaboration with peers, e-coaching, and resources. The authors present the advantages of a hybrid or blended approach to instructional design, which combines the best features of both face-to-face and online formats to enable self-paced learning and appropriate levels of interaction. The case concludes with discussion of a new initiative, Project KNOTiT, which is expanding the Ohio Transition to Teaching model to Kansas, Nevada, and Texas.

BACKGROUND

Provide background on the history of the organization, type of business, products/services provided, management structure, financial status (including annual sales), strategic planning, organizational culture, economic climate and any other issues that you feel are necessary to provide the reader with a comprehensive understanding of the background of the case.

The Ohio Transition to Teaching (TiT) Project was a 5-year project funded by the U.S. Department of Education from 2002-2007. The mission of Ohio TiT was to enhance Ohio’s alternative licensure pathway by supporting recruitment, professional
development, placement, and retention of teachers, specifically in its high-need, hard-to-staff rural and urban public school districts. Statewide partners included mostly large urban school districts such as Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Columbus, working in partnership with the Ohio State University (OSU) and the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) to support ODE’s alternative licensure route to teaching. The project provided access and support through an Online Resource Center to qualified applicants as newly hired educators. The Ohio TtT website, www.ohiottt.com, was referred to as an interactive online learning community providing participants with a one-stop resource for (1) online test preparation for the Praxis II: Principles of Learning and Teaching test; (2) online collaboration with other Ohio TtT alternative licensure teachers across the state; (3) sharing expertise from both ODE licensure specialists and master teachers for professional advice; and (4) online resources, links, and lesson plans to get new teachers started in teaching their subject area content, primarily in the shortage areas of math and science. As the Ohio Transition to Teaching Project was funded by the USDE, Office of Innovation and Improvement, this project was unique and allowed for flexible use of resources.

Management of the project resided at the Ohio State University to direct financial resources to support project goals identified in the grant proposal. Because this was a nonprofit venture, there were no sales, only the investment of approximately $2.5 million over 5 years to support 218 Ohio alternative route teachers with stipends as well as project staff of OSU and ODE with outside contractors, namely the technology company for website and e-tool development and production. Strategic planning was led by the Principal Investigator within the organizational culture and structure of OSU’s Research Foundation and the College of Education and Human Ecology’s Center on Education and Training for Employment. The economic climate was characterized by the state’s teacher shortages, primarily in Ohio’s large urban districts. Recruitment focused on potential entrants to education from among three groups: (1) recent college graduates (primarily with degrees in science or math to meet shortages in these subject/content areas); (2) career switchers from business, retirees, including military personnel (Troops to Teachers), who had bachelor degrees and practice in their fields; and (3) local paraprofessional staff, currently working in the high-need schools who wanted to become teachers and teach in their current school districts.

The issue or opportunity of this project was to expand the teacher workforce in Ohio. Recruiting was required to attract a new pool of teachers—especially for high-need, hard-to-staff school districts—primarily in the content areas of math and science. The needs of these school districts were unique, and the combination of the rate of retirements of educators, the high attrition rates of new teachers, and the continued growth in student enrollments, especially in minority populations, was putting pressure on providing an increased supply of highly qualified teachers (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). At the same time, the career literature suggests that adults are faced with changing realities in both their work and life. Whether it is a spouse being transferred, early retirement, or changing work interests, many adults will hold 5 to 10 different jobs over a lifetime. Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) define a transition as “life events entailing change” (p. 18) and describe it further as an event that results in new relationships, routines, assumptions, or roles. Some adults are interested in growing and learning whereas others may be forced to grow and learn due to life changes requiring them to seek new work opportunities. The goal of the Ohio TtT project was to make matches between high-need, hard-to-staff school district openings and the supply of new teachers wanting to enter the profession in Ohio. A problem is that, although these adults coming into the education profession often had past work experiences with their content area that transferred to the teaching job, they still required
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