Successful Lessons for Aspiring Virtual Facilitators

I see technology shaping and changing our curriculum continuously. From computer-based training modules, online content, wikis, webinars, online assessments, and virtual delivery, technology is reshaping how we teach. This can be assumed a good thing, but we have never taken a moment to verify its effectiveness. Through this research, I would like to take a step back and make sure it is indeed providing a positive impact on the learner.

I currently work for the Claims College for AAA Insurance. The Claims College administers training and development to all of the insurance employees across four different regional centers. Our training includes anyone from new hires to senior claims representatives, and covers everything from technical training to soft skills and leadership development. The goal of the Claims College is defined well in our purpose statement: “To develop and deliver relevant, timely, and effective Claims related technical, customer service, and other training to the Claims community in support of the goals and objectives of, and in partnership with, the Claims Department.”

Currently I work with trainers across four the different sites we serve: Colorado Springs, Las Vegas, Oklahoma City, and Hayward, California. For 2011, our goal is to rewrite and reevaluate all of our courses. I am helping in the curriculum design and writing as a co-project manager for all course development. In addition to these projects, I am a producer for our college’s virtual delivery. I work behind the scenes to help the trainer deliver a flawless class, so that the students can focus on the content and not be distracted by the virtual delivery platform itself.

Problem
Virtual facilitation is very new for our group. There are currently only two out of our nine trainers that have some experience with teaching virtually. Since our sites are located in four different states, and we also have many field representatives throughout the country, virtual training is becoming more important every day. In the past, to administer training to these reps, we would either fly them to a center or fly a trainer to them. With ever increasing budget cuts travel may soon become obsolete and virtual training could become the standard. However, teaching synchronously does not come naturally. There is a danger in assuming that a trainer can teach virtually as well as they can teach face to face, at least without practice first. With virtual training there are many new challenges that may arise, including endless changes in technology, converting lessons and job aids, classroom management, creating engaging activities, teaching students how to interact with each other and the facilitator, learning the virtual delivery platform, and so on. If our college does not first address some of these concerns, our virtual facilitation may not succeed.

Research Questions
Since online teaching is new to our college, there are many questions revolving around the topic that need to be addressed. The purpose of this action research is to determine ways to help
trainers that are new to virtual facilitation learn how to successfully teach online. In order to research this topic, several additional questions will be used to further the investigation:

- What are some initial perceptions or concerns of online teaching?
- How do trainers feel about teaching virtually before and after a session? What can they do differently or better next time?
- Are students satisfied with learning virtually? How are level one scores affected by virtual training?
- What are best practices for teaching online? Where can trainers go to get answers regarding virtual facilitation?
- What advice can experienced facilitators give to new virtual trainers?

Methods
There are three methods of research used in this action inquiry: Literature review, level one analysis, and interviews and surveys. First, through reviewing literature I determined what the standard best practices are for virtual facilitation. Next, I looked at student satisfaction to virtual facilitation. I reviewed satisfaction assessments and gathered any conclusions of the previous virtual sessions. I also interviewed past students to get their first-hand reactions to the sessions. Last, I interviewed several trainers new to virtual facilitation, and experienced online trainers. All interviews were conducted face to face, over the phone, or via email.

Participants
My research included participants from different areas of our business. They included the following:

1. **Current AAA Trainers**
   Since this research was geared towards the current training group, their input was invaluable. I included the trainers in my research through initial and post-training interviews, to determine how their virtual facilitation sessions went, and if there are new questions or concerns to address.

2. **Experienced Virtual Facilitators**
   I also conducted interviews with experienced virtual facilitators to get their insight on best practices. I asked these trainers if they had any advice or guidance they can offer aspiring virtual trainers. In our business, there are two experienced trainers I interviewed.

3. **Past Virtual Students**
   In order to get a learner’s perspective on successful virtual facilitation sessions, I talked to past students. I looked at their previous level one assessments, and interviewed them to determine if the classes were successful or if there were any shortcomings.

Data Collection & Analysis
For my data collection, three primary methods were used: Interviews and surveys, level one assessments, and literature review.
Interviews and Surveys – I conducted interviews with trainers new to virtual facilitation to find out if they had any concerns or reservations, and how they felt about any virtual sessions they have already taught. These interviews were done face to face and over the phone. In addition, I talked to experienced virtual facilitators to get their input. I asked for any advice they could give trainers that are new to this platform, and if they had any best practices or approaches they could share. These interviews were conducted via email.

Level One Assessments – I looked at student satisfaction scores from previous virtual classes. I reviewed these assessments and gathered conclusions compared to face to face sessions. I also interviewed past students to get their reactions to the online sessions.

Literature Review – In order to determine what the standard best practices are for virtual facilitation, I conducted a literature review. The goal of the literature review was to determine the best ways to teach online.

The table below gives an overview of my data collection sources:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Data Collection Method</th>
<th>Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are some initial perceptions or concerns of online teaching?</strong></td>
<td>Interviews, email correspondence, focus groups</td>
<td>Current AAA trainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do trainers feel about teaching virtually before and after a session?</strong></td>
<td>Interviews, email correspondence, focus groups</td>
<td>Current AAA trainers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are students as satisfied with learning virtually? How are level one scores affected by virtual training?</strong></td>
<td>Interviews, email correspondence, focus groups, level 1 assessments</td>
<td>Past virtual students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What are best practices for teaching online? Where can trainers go to get answers regarding virtual facilitation?</strong></td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Experienced virtual facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What advice can experienced facilitators give to new virtual trainers?</strong></td>
<td>Interviews, email correspondence, focus groups, literature review</td>
<td>Experienced virtual facilitators</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Questions & Methods
Below is a table that outlines how each of my research questions was researched, and where I found the information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Primary Source</th>
<th>Secondary Source</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are some initial perceptions or concerns of online teaching?</td>
<td>AAA trainers</td>
<td>Literary review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do trainers feel about teaching virtually before and after a session? What can they do differently or better next time?</td>
<td>AAA trainers</td>
<td>Experienced virtual facilitators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are students as satisfied with learning virtually? How are level one scores affected by virtual training?</td>
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<td>Experienced virtual facilitators</td>
<td>Literary review</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schedule
Listed below is the schedule I plan to follow in order to stay on track and complete my action research report on time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week of</th>
<th>Item(s)</th>
<th>Output(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>February 20</td>
<td>Organize data collection methods</td>
<td>Final proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 27</td>
<td>Interviews with AAA trainers</td>
<td>Needs analysis for research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 6</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>Initial sources for literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 13</td>
<td>Finalize literature review</td>
<td>Literature review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 20</td>
<td>Analyze previous level 1 data</td>
<td>Level 1 conclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 27</td>
<td>Continuation of research</td>
<td>None</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 3</td>
<td>Analysis of all research</td>
<td>Report findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 10</td>
<td>Begin drafting final report</td>
<td>Draft for feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 17</td>
<td>Finalize report</td>
<td>Final report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 24</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>Present findings to college</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td>TBD</td>
<td>TBD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Ethical/Stakeholder Impact
To keep this report accurate and prevent any biases, checks for rigor were performed throughout the entire process. Throughout the research, I checked in regularly with my coworkers and manager, letting them know what I found and what their thoughts were. Their perspective helped keep the research on track and prevented any inaccuracies in the analysis. Another way I ensured accuracy was by gathering data from multiple sources. By talking to
previous students, multiple trainers, and conducting a literature review, checks for vigor occurred through triangulation.

**Findings**
In order to find answers to my research questions, I turned to literature, past students, and new and experienced virtual trainers.

**Literature Review**
In order to determine how trainers can successfully teach online, literature was a very valuable resource. Many helpful articles were found through both Google Scholar, as well as the Auraria library database. I planned my literature research on two of my research questions: “How can trainers new to virtual facilitation learn how to successfully teach online,” and “What are current best practices for teaching online?” My initial research started with the phrase “online facilitation,” but the topics I found were too broad. I wanted to focus on successful methods and best practices, and eventually redefined my search criteria to “online delivery techniques.” To broaden my results, I also searched using the words “virtual facilitation,” “e-learning,” and “distance learning.” Many of my results focused on all aspects of successful asynchronous teaching, including design and development, Content Management Systems (CMS) and Learning Management Systems (LMS), delivery techniques, and learner expectations. One of the limitations of my research was that many findings thoroughly discussed multi-week online sessions, such as online college or graduate classes. In our company, we focus on smaller virtual sessions that last for only a few hours or a few days. Because of this, I focused primarily on the results involving delivery techniques for successful online trainers.

Throughout the literature there were useful ideas on how to become a successful online facilitator. Common themes were found, including the use of a support staff, changing the facilitator and learner roles, attaining new skills and competencies, and creating lessons that allowed for active involvement of the learners.

**Support Staff**
To be effective at virtual delivery, a facilitator cannot do the job alone. They must rely on a support staff behind the scenes to help the facilitation seem flawless to the learner. Fein (2003) determines that a support staff’s main priority is to troubleshoot, keep the content flowing, and support technical difficulties. IT support is helpful in order to be successful with technology requirements. A producer or assistant is also an important role in a successful online lesson. Fein states “this assistant can help transform synchronous time into trouble-free, fast-moving, interactive events that keep learners involved and the instructor on track” (2003, p. 52). Fein discusses the importance of the assistant role further, in that they can watch participants, answer questions, and keep the instructor informed of students’ needs. “In short, the instructor can stay focused on content while the assistant takes care of everything else” (Fein 2003, p. 52).
New Roles
Facilitators that are new to online teaching will have new and different roles. Online teachers need to be "agents of change, to motivate students to use new tools and methods, to help build confidence and understanding of both potential and limitations, and to overcome fears about technology and the unfamiliarly high level of visibility of individual contributions" (Gunn 2001, p. 239). Paloff and Pratt point also point out that in order to be successful online facilitators, instructors need to remain open-minded and expect frustrations (as cited by Fein, 2003). The facilitator role itself also changes in the online context. No longer is the teacher a content provider, but is instead the content facilitator (Fein 2003). To be a successful online teacher, Deubel (as cited by Yang & Cornelious) suggests that "instructors could read literature about online learning environments first, and then get trained to use required technology, and finally seek assistance from experienced instructors when needed" (2005, p. 5). The teacher is not just a facilitator, but also a moderator, coach, counselor, and mentor. The learner role also changes in the virtual environment. In the online environment, students are actively participating and collaborating with each other. Through this, they begin to develop their own personal understanding of the course content. To ensure successful online learning, teachers should inform students in advance of their new roles in the virtual environment (Yang & Cornelious, 2005). Teachers should also get an understanding of their learner needs first. It is important to determine what type of learners the students are, and how comfortable they are with technology. Yang and Cornelious recommend doing this through an online survey or questionnaire prior to the beginning of the class (2005).

New Skills
New virtual teachers also need to have different skills and competencies. Throughout the literature, one of the biggest trends found was becoming proficient with technology. According to Shi, Bonk, and Magjuka, teachers new to online facilitation need to upgrade their technical skills, and stay current with new technology development (2006). Cuellar (as sited by Shi et al) points out that besides technology skills, instructors need to understand "how to operate the learning platform, and troubleshoot with problems online learners may encounter" (2006, pp. 5-6). Ultimately, the goal when teaching virtually is to keep the technology transparent, and allow the students to focus on the course content rather than the technology (Hootstein 2002). When using a new platform and technology, Fein advises online facilitators to stay flexible. Prepare for learners to have problems with some of the technologies, because it is likely to happen. Teachers should have a backup plan or strategy in place in case the technology fails. Fein goes on to say that “many unforeseen circumstances can occur with technology, and instructors need to plan for them in advance, during the design phase, so that they are prepared when the content is delivered” (2003, p. 49). Before giving online training, Yang and Cornelious recommend the trainer learn the designated software they will be using. They must be able to understand how to manage a course online, integrate web materials, and how to interact with students online (2005). Yang and Cornelious continue that “faculty receiving training before actually delivering online courses is crucial” (2005, pp. 5-6). New virtual facilitators should also learn what it is like to be a student in an online classroom first. Yang and Cornelious recommend
that teachers receive this training online as well, "since it provides the instructors the same learning experiences as their students" (2005, p. 6). Mantyla (as cited by Fein) also agrees; "instructors are strongly recommended to take an online course or attend a videoconference to see what it’s like to be a learner. This should be done prior to the development of the online course" (2003, pp. 48-49).

There are other competencies teachers new to online facilitation must have in order to be successful. When transitioning from face-to-face teaching to an online environment, teachers can benefit from developing new time management strategies (Shi et al, 2006). Having better time management skills will help the facilitator in the preparation phase. Fein notes that creating an online lesson can take more initial time than a face to face course. In addition to the course content, teachers now need to figure out how to convert content to web-based classes, add hotlinks, add content to an LMS, and create online assessments (Fein 2003).

**Student-Centered Lessons**

When it comes to the actual delivery of online classes, the majority of the literature reviewed discussed the importance of keeping students actively involved and engaged. This begins in the design phase. Coomey and Stephenson note the importance of structuring activities and designing the course in such a way that promotes dialogue, active involvement of the students, and provides personal and other feedback to the learners (2001). Yang and Cornelious agree, stating that “designing some activities or discussion questions which can trigger students' interest to explore the answer... will ultimately foster students' critical thinking and deep learning” (2001, p. 39). Designers and instructors cannot make the assumption that just because students are told to participate in dialogue that they will. Instead, designers need to plan activities for dialogue up front and carefully structure them into the course. Instructors must have clearly defined questions in order to guide the dialogue, and keep it focused (Coomey & Stephenson, 2001). When designing online curriculum, Yang and Cornelious believe that "integrating deep learning, critical thinking, collaborative learning, and problem-based learning methods into instruction is critical for instructors to improve the quality of online instruction" (2001, p. 6). They also found that this is the best way to encourage students’ critical thinking skills and deeper (Yang & Cornelious, 2001). Hootstein (2002) agrees that problem-based learning is the best style for online facilitation. He notes that through this technique, learners form their own questions, research options, come to their own conclusions, and act on what they found. Authentic problems to solve make learning more meaningful on a personal level for student. Hootstein also believes that online learners are successful if they are challenged with a problem to solve, a project to complete, or a dilemma that needs to be resolved (2002). The project-based approach allows learners to ask questions and therefore stay engaged. Several studies reported that the best methods for encouraging participation include use of case studies, collaborative studies, and small group dialogues (Fein, 2003; Hootstein, 2002; Yang & Cornelious, 2001). Creating projects for the learners to solve also helps accommodate multiple learning styles, and provides experiences for both visual and auditory learners (Hootstein, 2002).
How do trainers feel about teaching virtually before and after a session? What can they do differently or better next time?

To determine the answer to this question, I interviewed two trainers new to virtual facilitation. The questions I asked are highlighted in Appendix A. Both trainers expressed concerns with teaching online for the first time. Both shared that they were nervous about training in a new setting. The both also expressed concerns with the learners being distracted and not paying attention. After teaching online for the first time, both trainers felt the session went better than they expected. However, they still couldn’t tell if the learners were engaged or if they got out of the class what the trainers wanted them to. The trainers attributed the successful session to a large amount of preparation, and having a producer help them. Both trainers explained that they practiced the classes several times on their own first. They expressed the importance of expecting the unexpected, and having a backup plan in case things go wrong.

When asked if they had any tips or tricks for other new trainers, both had some good advice. One mentioned that she didn’t realize how distracting the chat function can be as a trainer. Her advice to other trainers is to let the producer keep an eye on chat, so the flow of the presentation does not get disrupted for the learners. She also recommended learning as much about the virtual facilitation platform as possible, and see if there are options to turn features off that may be distracting. Another piece of advice given was to do a complete run through, including changing the slides, using the features such as chat and polling questions, and dial in on the phone. The trainer noting that doing these things will help work some of the kinks out, and allow the trainer to be completely prepared. Other tips included using voice fluctuation to keep the learners interested. “You almost have to go overboard with the enthusiasm.” Students can only rely on the sound of the trainer’s voice, so if they hear the excitement in the voice, it helps the learners pay attention and not get distracted. Lastly, and most importantly, one piece of advice for trainers new to virtual facilitation was to “give yourself a break. It is rare to be perfect the first time. It just takes practice.”

Are students as satisfied with learning virtually? How are level one scores affected by virtual training?

In order to answer this question, I decided to turn to the students themselves. Our college administers level one assessments for all classes taught. These assessments are based off of the Likert scale, where students are asked to rank their level of satisfaction (5 being that they are very satisfied, and 1 as strongly dissatisfied). These surveys are administered via www.zoomerang.com, and student responses are anonymous. Questions for these assessments are listed Appendix B.
When looking at level one student responses, the results of all 2011 instructor-led training (ILT) sessions were compared to virtual instructor-led sessions (vILT). To date, 20 instructor-led and 2 virtual classes have been taught. A list of the classes and their scores is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Class</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Casualty Specialist</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Casualty Specialist</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Systems</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Systems</td>
<td>4.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Achieve Global</td>
<td>4.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Achieve Global</td>
<td>4.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Casualty Specialist</td>
<td>3.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Collision Estimating</td>
<td>4.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Casualty Specialist</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Achieve Global</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Achieve Global</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Systems</td>
<td>5.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Homeowners</td>
<td>4.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Collision Estimating</td>
<td>4.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vILT</td>
<td>Systems</td>
<td>4.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Collision Estimating</td>
<td>4.90</td>
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<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Negotiations</td>
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<td>ILT</td>
<td>Negotiations</td>
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<tr>
<td>vILT</td>
<td>Systems</td>
<td>4.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ILT</td>
<td>Claims Service Adjuster</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>4.65</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When looking further at the level one scores, it made sense to compare the instructor led classes to the virtual classes. This would help determine if there was a trend between the two. The average level one scores for are as follows:

![2011 Overall Average Scores](image)
When comparing the two, the face to face instruction has an average of 4.7 out of 5, while the virtual facilitation is 4.2. This chart shows the level of student satisfaction, and the classes taught face to face receive higher scores. While the scores for virtual facilitation are lower, the student comments still express satisfaction. When asked about the facilitation, one student responded that, "being able to connect a group of people spread across the national in a virtual web-based meeting and disperse information" was the most affective part of the learning. Another student agreed, stating that “the online presentation worked well.”

To further explore this question, I surveyed past virtual students and asked them to reflect on their experience. These students were surveyed via www.zoomerang.com. The questions asked of these students can be found in Appendix C. While the survey was sent out to 31 students, I was disappointed to see only six final responses. However, of the six responses, 100% of the reactions were positive. When asked if the students were satisfied, all students responded that they were. When asked if the trainer could have done anything differently for future sessions, the answer was no. All students responded that they felt actively involved in the sessions. When asked if students would like to attend future virtual session, every single person responded yes. The feedback also suggested that while the students would prefer face to face, they recognize that it might not be the best option when employees are in multiple locations. One student went on to say, “Face to face is preferred, but in an environment where a group of people are scattered across the country, it saves time and money to utilize a virtual format.” Another student summed up virtual training as this:

I think virtual training is good when it is the only option we have—for example, if we need to train field staff that cannot come into a center for face to face training. [...] No matter how perfectly the training is delivered, there is always something lost and the face to face contact is important, for the employees as well as the trainers.

Overall, the conclusion of this data is split. While it is obvious that students prefer the face to face interaction they get by instructor led teaching, they also appear to recognize the value of virtual facilitation. Both level one scores and student surveys support this. As a result of this split, the level one scores still show a high level of satisfaction in the training session, just not as high as if it were face to face.

When looking at both the level one results and the survey questions, something to consider is the amount of information received. While it is easy to compare results for face to face training to virtual facilitation, the lower amount of classes taught thus far needs to be considered. Of the 22 classes taught in our college, only two classes (9%) were considered virtual. Also, of the 31 students surveyed, only six people (19%) responded. Because of the low numbers, the results might be slightly skewed.
What are best practices for teaching online? Where can trainers go to get answers regarding virtual facilitation?

This question was answered through the literature research, which can be found in that document. In summary, throughout the literature review many common themes occurred, including new roles for teachers and students, new skills and competencies for instructors, and best methods for keeping the virtual student involved. A teacher new to virtual delivery might feel overwhelmed with some of these new challenges, especially involving technology. However, they should also be reassured to find similarities between virtual and face-to-face teaching. For example, the research stresses the importance of keeping students actively involved and creating lessons that reflect different learning styles. This holds true for face-to-face facilitation as well. Research recommends that a virtual facilitator should have a solid support staff to help the classes run flawlessly, and to collaborate with experienced facilitators. This is also true in face-to-face teaching, as collaboration is important in becoming a better facilitator in general. Through the methods and techniques outlined in the literature review, a facilitator can improve not only on their skills in the online environment, but in the physical classroom as well.

What advice can experienced facilitators give to new virtual trainers?

When answering this question, I turned to the facilitators within our college that have previous experience. I surveyed and interviewed two trainers, and the questions that were asked are located in Appendix D. Both trainers had good advice for inexperienced virtual facilitators. Some advice given was to be prepared to teach. Like the newer trainers, the experienced trainers also recommended running through all the materials before class, checking that the software works, and practice delivering the class at least 3 times before the actual session takes place. Also, the advised to keep in mind student interaction throughout the session. One facilitator advised that it’s important to “make sure that you are teaching to objectives that can be assessed in a virtual setting. If you cannot assess the objective in virtual, it may not be the best value.” Experienced trainers also advise the importance of the tone of the trainer’s voice when teaching virtually. One recommends that the trainers talk with their hands, as it helps with voice inflection. Lastly, both trainers addressed student involvement and had some advice on the topic. One recommended that to keep students actively involved in the learning is to have them have discussions with each other, instead of having just the facilitator lecture. Another tip is to keep a list of the students, and “cycle through them, asking specific individuals to interact in different ways.” The information given by the experienced trainers was very valuable, and will help new trainers to sharpen their virtual facilitation skills.

Discussion and Recommendations

Through the data analysis, the questions asked throughout this action research can be answered. When looking for tips on how to become a better virtual facilitator, the literature and experienced trainers presented a lot of valuable information. Talking to trainers that have taught online for the first time was also beneficial, as they gave insight as to how to prepare for
virtual teaching, and what other new teachers can do before teaching their first sessions. Talking with previous students of online courses was helpful as well. The overall results from this research are split. While it is obvious that students prefer the face to face interaction they get by learning in person, they also appear to recognize the value of virtual facilitation. Both level one scores and student surveys support this. As a result of this split, the level one scores still show a high level of satisfaction in the training session, just not as high as if it were face to face. Looking at all of this data and information, trainers new to virtual facilitation can be a bit more prepared before teaching online and know what to expect from the students.

Recommendations
After conducting this research, I have a few recommendations for our college and trainers new to virtual facilitation. First, it is important to practice. I recommend the trainers do as much as possible to get experience with virtual facilitation, as it is important to practice the skills needed to be successful. I would also recommend that the college consider always having a producer for virtual facilitation sessions.

Next Steps
One question that I wanted to address was finding tools or resources for the trainers to walk away with. I envisioned finding websites or job aids for the trainers to use. When I was conducting my research, I focused on the other questions instead. Next, I would like to continue my research to have tools for the trainers to have when trying to teach virtually.

I would also like to research how to transition a newer online trainer to the next level of facilitation. I’d like to find out how they can create interactive activities, possibly by using different types of media and thinking outside of the facilitation box as to how to better their lessons and activities. Instead of focusing on a broader “how do you start to teach online?” strategy, I would move to a more specific strategy such as “how do you keep online learners engaged?” or “how do you create lessons that ensure the learners comprehended the content?”

Reflections
In performing this action research, I was hoping to find positive impacts for myself, my coworkers, and my business. For myself I wanted to find additional ways in which I can support our trainers in their virtual facilitation. As a producer to these sessions, my research has had an immediate impact on how I can assist in these online classes. If the trainers are successful in administering online training, it will help us succeed not only as a college, but also as a business. Reaching more of our insurance adjusters nation-wide will allow us to continue provide excellent service to our members.

The research was very valuable, especially since our college is moving to more online classes every day. I believe now is the right time to give the trainers the proper tools to be able to be more successful at teaching virtually. Through this research, the trainers are in a better position to be able to thrive at teaching in this new environment.
References

Coomey, M. & Stephenson, J. (2001). Online learning: it is all about dialogue, involvement, support and control - according to the research. *Teaching and learning online: Pedagogies for new technologies.*


Appendix A
Before and after questions for new virtual facilitators:

1. How did you feel before teaching virtually for the first time? How did you feel after it was over? Please explain.
2. How do you prepare differently for a virtual class compared to a face to face class?
3. What was your experience when first starting out as a virtual facilitator? Do you have any helpful stories to share?
4. What tips or tricks can you share for new virtual facilitators?
5. How do you keep students actively involved in the lesson?
6. After teaching virtually, is there anything you would do different next time?
7. Additional questions or comments
Appendix B
Level 1 Questions based on Likert scale:
(5 = Strongly Agree, 4 = Agree, 3 = Neutral, 2 = Disagree, 1 = Strongly Disagree)

1. Course Title
2. Location
3. Instructor's Name
4. Course Start Date
5. Course Completion Date
6. The course met the stated training objectives.
7. The course addressed key areas in which I needed training
8. The course provided me with a good understanding of the information (procedures, policies, etc)
9. I gained skills and/or knowledge I did not have before
10. I will be able to do my job better as a result of the course.
11. There was a good balance between instructor presentation, participation involvement, and class exercises.
12. The course materials will be helpful to me in my job.
13. The facilitator clearly stated learning objectives.
14. The facilitator encouraged participation, questions, and comments.
15. The facilitator presented the content clearly.
16. The facilitator provided enough time for questions and interaction with others.
17. The facilitator was prepared and knew the subject matter.
18. Overall, I was satisfied with this course.
19. I have all the necessary tools I need to provide the services I have learned in this class.
20. The business I work for supports the service procedures I have learned in this class.
21. Please describe what was most effective about the course (optional)
22. Please describe what was least effective about the course. How could we improve it? (optional)
Appendix C
Virtual Facilitation Survey – General Feedback

1. Name (optional)
2. Name of class / topic covered
3. How satisfied were you with the lesson in a virtual format versus face to face? Did the class meet your expectations? Please explain.
4. What did the trainer do well in the virtual setting? What did you like best?
5. What could the trainer have done differently? How could they have improved the virtual facilitation?
6. Do you feel like you were actively involved or engaged in the class? Please explain why or why not. Give examples to clarify.
7. Was your overall experience in the virtual training session positive or negative? Please explain why.
8. What advice could you give the trainer to make the online experience better?
9. Would you attend future virtual training sessions? Please explain why or why not.
10. Additional questions or comments (optional)
Appendix D

Questions for experienced virtual facilitators:

1. How do you prepare differently for a virtual class compared to a face to face class?
2. What was your experience when first starting out as a virtual facilitator? Do you have any helpful stories to share?
3. What tips or tricks can you share for new virtual facilitators?
4. How do you keep students actively involved in the lesson?
5. Where do you go for more information or resources on virtual facilitation (websites, books, articles, etc)?
6. What advice can you give to someone looking to start online teaching?
7. Additional questions or comments