

Section 2a:

Workshop/Presentation Approach

Professional development is most commonly delivered through single workshops and conferences, or through workshop series, institutes, or coursework offered through colleges and universities. A state survey of staff development practices (Kutner, et al., 1991) found that single workshops are implemented in 43 states, with individual conferences offered in 31 states. The same survey revealed that workshops usually consist of three- or four-hour sessions offered through local adult education programs, at staff development centers, or at some other locale. Workshop content usually focuses on a specific topic, such as classroom organization (and participants generally lack the opportunity for follow-up). Workshop facilitators may be professional trainers, employed by a staff-development center, or they may be independent consultants or adult education teachers with expertise in particular areas.

Conferences often consist of workshops and plenary sessions on various topics. They may be state-sponsored, day-long events for practitioners, which may be held on a statewide or on a regional basis, or meetings of professional associations, such as the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education or Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages.

Although these traditional formats continue to persist, more states have begun to implement a series of workshops that involve a sequenced group of three- or four-hour sessions, which enable practitioners to acquire new concepts and skills, practice them between sessions in their own learning environments, and give and receive feedback from their colleagues. A number of programs have adapted the multi-session, instructional packets developed under the *Study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches* (described in Appendix C of this *Guide*).

The Workshop/Presentation approach is well-suited to practitioners who learn best from an expert providing information or skill-building in a particular area. It is important to note, however, that practitioners who are dependent upon others to guide them through a learning experience in one area may be self-directed in other areas. The Workshop/Presentation approach also is well-suited to individuals who know little about a topic area and want to build a body of knowledge, before introducing new skills and concepts into their own learning environments.

Underlying Assumptions

There are several assumptions underlying the Workshop/Presentation approach (Sparks and Loucks-Horsley, 1990) — the two most common being:

- Behaviors and instructional techniques are worth replicating by practitioners; and
- Practitioners can change behaviors and learn to replicate behaviors not previously within their own instructional experience.

Theory and Background

The theory and background supporting the Workshop/Presentation approach to professional development is well documented in the K-12 research literature. Joyce and Showers (1988), for example, found this approach to be most effective when it incorporated the following components: theory, demonstration/modelling, practice, feedback, and coaching. Each of these components will be described under Step 3 of the Implementation section below. Coaching, for example, is not a practice that can be accomplished in single workshops or conferences, as those formats do not provide opportunities for follow-up. Sequential workshops, however, spaced over time, provide opportunities for feedback and coaching from peers or supervisors.

The quality of facilitators is a key element of effective workshops/presentations. The research literature cites the importance of using facilitators who not only possess an appropriate knowledge base for their particular content area, but who have skills to share with others (Jones and Lowe, 1990; Loucks-Horsley, et al., 1987). Other research cites the use of adult education practitioners as facilitators as a key element of workshop success (Sherman, et al., 1991).

Implementation

Implementing the Workshop/Presentation approach generally is the responsibility of the professional development specialist and/or local program administrator, and involves the following four steps:

Step 1: Conduct needs assessments.

A key to successful workshops/presentations is to ensure that the content meets the needs of the practitioners targeted. This often can be difficult when working with both new and experienced instructors, or when instructors from different fields (ABE, ESL, ASE) are included in a single workshop. Traditionally, workshop content was determined by adult education administrators; recently, however, the emphasis is on practitioners identifying their own professional development needs. If this current method is used before planning any workshops or presentations, a needs assessment is conducted first, to determine strategies or topics that practitioners would like to explore and second, to identify the ways practitioners prefer to learn. This information helps professional development coordinators to focus the content and the strategies used in this approach.

Types of needs assessments vary, but they may include (a) formal practitioner surveys, (b) feedback on workshop evaluation forms, (c) recommendations by professional development specialists or facilitators, (d) informal discussions between teachers and administrators, (e) classroom observations/peer reviews, (f) staff meetings, or (g) an occupational analysis to identify the skills and knowledge required to successfully perform the necessary tasks.

Kentucky's Department of Adult Education and Literacy employed the occupational analysis approach. Using a Designing A CurriculUM (DACUM) process, a facilitator led a panel of instructors serving as “experts” through a brainstorming process that resulted in a description of specific tasks performed by adult basic education and literacy instructors — and included the identification of skills, knowledge and traits necessary to perform these tasks. Afterwards, panels of adult educators from across the state validated the findings.

Three other samples of needs assessments/profiles appear in Appendix A. One profile, administered to instructors, provides information on the practitioner's instructional situation, preferred learning styles, and professional development preferences — and identifies areas for professional development. Another profile, administered to professional development coordinators, provides similar types of information, but also focuses on the coordinator's level of knowledge and experience (with different professional development approaches). The third profile, targeted to state and local administrators, gathers information to assess administrator's own learning needs, and it enables administrators and professional development coordinators to review the environment in which their programs operate.

Step 2: Plan for the Workshop/Presentation session.

Decisions about the workshop topic may be made by aggregating information gathered through the needs assessments/profiles, or it may be based on recommendations of the staff or professional

development coordinator. Once the decision is made and resources have been allocated, the next step is to plan the session. This step is actually composed of several activities for which those designing workshops/presentations should:

- **Plan** logistics for the sessions (e.g., time, location, number of participants.) If multiple session workshops are planned, it is important to identify and reserve the facilities, dates, and time of all the sessions in advance. Potential participants will then be able to schedule the sessions on their own calendars. (Facilities with moveable chairs and space large enough to accommodate breakout activities are most desirable.)
- **Identify** a facilitator or presenter with the appropriate content knowledge.
- **Publicize** the workshop or workshop series. Consider sending out flyers to potential participants, and include a statement of administrative support and commitment. If multiple session workshops are offered, it is important that individuals who respond to the flyer commit to all sessions.
- **Prepare** materials and organize equipment (e.g., VHS, player and monitor, overhead projector, flip charts) for training. If another facilitator has been hired, this task could be completed by that individual. The professional development coordinator, however, may be responsible for ensuring that the equipment is available.
- **Duplicate** all materials for the session and arrange materials into packets. By providing one packet of materials to each individual, constant handling of the materials during the session can be avoided.
- **Obtain** name tags for participants.
- **Prepare** a sign-in sheet to verify attendance at all sessions. Include spaces for names, addresses, and phone numbers, for future contact with participants.
- **Arrange** for any refreshments that will be available.
- **Develop** an evaluation instrument to provide feedback to the presenters or facilitators and to identify possible future needs for follow-up, support, and/or additional sessions.

Step 3: Conduct workshops incorporating elements of effective professional development.

Include in the workshop sessions the research-based components of effective professional development cited earlier and outlined below:

- **Theory** that underlies any new practice is a necessary component. It provides the rationale for a given practice, its effect on learners, and the constructs upon which it is based. Use of an inductive format (participants extract theory from experiential activities) in presenting theory is an effective method for participants to learn about and internalize theory.
- **Demonstrations** that illustrate new practices and reinforce their use are essential to full comprehension and implementation. Demonstrations make concrete the application of

theory to practice. Among the demonstration techniques are videos, role play, and modeling by the trainer.

- **Practice** new approaches in a safe environment. Practice, either within the workshop itself, or between sessions (if sequenced workshops are provided) in their own learning environment allows participants to “try out” new skills and concepts.
- **Feedback** by colleagues or supervisors on their attempts to implement a new practice or skill is needed by practitioners. Feedback helps participants to reflect and to analyze their performance.
- **Coaching** from peers or supervisors to transfer knowledge from the workshop setting to participants' own instructional environment is needed by practitioners. Coaching occurs over time and allows practitioners to reflect, analyze, refine, and internalize new approaches.

The 10 instructional packets developed by Pelavin Research Institute under the *Study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches* incorporate theory, demonstration, practice and feedback. Programs adapting these modules may provide coaching as a follow-up to the workshop sessions. (Appendix C provides a description of the packets and their availability.)

Step 4: Evaluate results of the Workshop/Presentation.

Evaluation is consistently identified in the professional literature as both a critical component and a weak link in the delivery of professional development, but it must not be overlooked. Any effective evaluation should concern itself with changes that take place in instructional practices.

Both formal and informal methods of evaluation can be employed in determining the impact of the Workshop/Presentation on instructional behavior. More formal methods use some type of instrument to assess changes in instructional behavior, before and after the workshop. Practitioners can complete self-evaluations, or a peer or supervisor can complete an evaluation instrument after classroom observations. Analysis of the completed instruments enables practitioners and supervisors to identify areas of strength and weakness and to work on improving instruction. Other less formal or more qualitative approaches include maintaining records/journals of an instructor's own reflections of what occurs in the classroom, or conducting ethnographic studies that describe what happens in the classroom when new instructional strategies are implemented. Section 4 on Evaluation in this *Guide* provides a more indepth discussion of an evaluation model for professional developments.

The following scenario is designed to show the four steps involved in implementing the Workshop/Presentation approach.

SCENARIO: WORKSHOP/PRESENTATION APPROACH

A large urban ABE/GED/ESL program has just been notified that effective the coming year, the funders will require tangible, measurable documentation of student achievement measured every three months. If there is no measurable improvement, students will be removed from the program. If documentation is not available for all students in all programs, clients will no longer be referred to the program and the funding will ultimately be withdrawn.

Step 1: Conduct needs assessment

The director convened a meeting of all affected instructors and presented the problem. It was acknowledged that if the program did not propose a way to measure student progress, one would be imposed on them and mandated by the funders.

There was a great deal of concern and resistance on the part of the instructors. They felt that it was unfair and poor educational practice to expect that students be tested every three months, it would mean a lot more work for the instructors, and it would take time away from teaching. The issue was also raised that there were not enough standardized tests to validly measure every 90 days. It was decided that a committee (four instructors) would be formed to deal with the problem and bring recommendations back to the larger group in order to reach a consensus and develop a plan. The committee met with a professor from a local college who was knowledgeable about alternative assessment strategies and also familiar with ABE programs.

After 30 days, the committee met and reported their experiences. The professor led them through a discussion about the pros and cons of each strategy and what would be most workable for the majority of instructors. It was decided that each instructor be given a list of possibilities and asked to select at least two strategies that they would use in their class. The program director and professor visited each

instructor twice during the month to see how well they were implementing the assessment strategies in their classes. Advice, assistance, and support were provided as needed. It was also decided that all students would be tested using a standardized test every six months.

Step 2: Planning for the Workshop/Presentation session

The classroom visits and discussions with instructors helped the program director determine the content of the all staff professional development workshop. A three-hour presentation was scheduled. The director had a flyer posted in all instructional locations notifying staff of the date, time, location, and content of the workshop. Notification also indicated the type of follow-up that would be implemented after the presentation.

The professor at the local college was hired to facilitate the workshop. She was assisted by the four committee members. The professor prepared all necessary hand-outs and duplicated them prior to the workshop. A large room, with moveable chairs and tables, was secured to enable the facilitator to divide the participants into small groups. Several flip charts were made available for small group work.

Step 3: Conduct workshops incorporating elements of effective professional development

All staff participated in the three-hour workshop. The professor presented the various types of assessments that had been presented to committee members. The committee members then each shared their own experiences and discussed the strategies they preferred. Instructors were divided into small groups led by a committee member or the professor. Questions were raised and discussed relative to the various strategies. Group leaders demonstrated the techniques for implementing some of the strategies. The groups then reported back.

As a follow-up, each instructor was asked to select a minimum of two strategies they would implement during the next three months in their classes. Instructors were asked to keep journals noting strategies they used, situations when strategies worked particularly well, and any difficulties in implementing strategies. Committee members were given release time to schedule visits to classes to help teachers in developing their own strategies for measuring and recording student progress.

A final meeting was held after three months. Instructors met in small groups to share their experiences and identify any other ongoing problems. Instructor journals provided a source of information for the discussion. Following a report from each group, a discussion was led by the professor addressing any other problems or issues. A consensus was reached among the staff regarding the program's approach to the problem. An assessment policy was then developed to be implemented with the beginning of the next year.

Step 4: Evaluate results of the Workshop/Presentation

Notes from committee member visits to instructors' classrooms, and reflections in instructors' journals indicated that instructors experimented with at least two new assessment strategies. These strategies were refined until instructors felt more comfortable in their implementation. Instructors agreed on several strategies to implement and they became part of program policy.

The approach initiated by the director allowed for instructor input throughout the process, from identification of the problem to development of the solution. It was developed by them after an opportunity to learn and try out the strategies. It is hoped that this approach will lead to more effective documentation of student progress and will address the concerns raised by the funders.

Results

Workshops/Presentations is one of the few professional development approaches whose impact has been best documented. Research by Joyce and Showers (1988) show that when the five components (theory, demonstration, practice, feedback and coaching) are incorporated into the training, instructors make gains in their level of knowledge and skills, and transfer what they have

learned in the workshop to their own classroom environment. Similar findings were reported by Wade in 1985. There have been other findings in various K-12 subject areas that demonstrate the impact of the Workshop/ Presentation on teacher behavior and student learning. For example, as a result of a 10-session program in mathematics for elementary teachers, Good and Grouws (1987) found changes in teachers' classroom practice including improved mathematics presentations as well as improved student performance.

Issues

The Workshop/Presentation approach is often the easiest and most inexpensive approach to professional development because it accommodates large numbers of staff. However, adequate time often is not provided to conduct and analyze a needs assessment, plan sessions based on learners needs, solicit expert facilitators, and incorporate components of professional development. Lack of attention to planning and implementation will result in less than satisfactory results.

In addition, peer observation and coaching (see Observation/Feedback approach) appear to be critical to the transfer of new skills and knowledge to the practitioners own teaching environment (Joyce and Showers 1988). Single workshop sessions or conferences are only effective in building awareness. Longer-term, multiple-session approaches that incorporate follow-up strategies are more likely to bring about actual changes in instruction.

As with all professional development approaches, administrative support and commitment to the process is critical. Administrative support can be demonstrated by involvement in follow-up activities, communication with and encouragement of staff to engage in Workshop/Presentation activities, recommendation of resource materials, allocation of necessary resources, and provision of time for instructors to share new skills and knowledge with colleagues.

References

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