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The Instructional Skills Workshop Program: An Inter-Institutional Approach

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INTRODUCTION OF SYSTEM-WIDE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The college and institute system in British Columbia includes 15 community colleges and five provincial institutes offering a mix of university transfer, vocational, career, technical, basic education, and community services programming. The faculty for these programs have formal qualifications in their disciplines but seldom have formal training in instruction, curricula design, or adult education. Only the vocational sector has had a formal program (the Instructor's Diploma program) specifically designed to develop their teaching capabilities. The development of instructional personnel has always been a concern of the institutions but was initially expressed largely by supporting individuals to attend conferences for subject matter updating rather than for the improvement of instructional capabilities (Pankratz et al., 1976, p. 5).

The B.C. Council of College and Institute Principals recognized the need for instructional skills development

as a system-wide priority. In 1978, the Council submitted a formal proposal requesting that "the Ministry of Education give immediate moral and financial support to the establishment and maintenance of a system-wide program of professional development and institutional renewal for the colleges and provincial institutes in British Columbia" (B.C. Council of Principals, 1978, p. 2). Bruce Fraser, then Executive Director of the Ministry's Program Services Division, responded to this request by establishing a program budget and assigning one-half of my time for the development and coordination of system-wide professional development initiatives. Through cooperative efforts with college and institute personnel, the Ministry of Education has played a major leadership role in ensuring that professional development and institutional renewal opportunities are available in the B.C. post-secondary system.

MAJOR FEATURES OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION INITIATIVES

The response of the Ministry of Education was based on a number of operational guidelines. Programs supported by the Ministry of Education were to:

1. Provide training for local personnel to deliver on-site programs for their peers.
2. Be relevant to instructors in all discipline areas and with varying levels of instructional experience.
3. Allow for voluntary participation by institutions and by individuals within institutions.
4. Be based on shared funding, including Ministry project funding and a commitment of a portion of the operating budget of the institutions.
5. Use personnel within the system to ensure:
 - development of higher-level skills within the human resources of the British Columbia post-secondary education system;
 - encouragement of a climate of professionalism and a capability in the staff of the colleges and institutes to

address their own and each other's developmental needs;

—evolution of a diversity of approaches in various institutions resulting in an atmosphere of experimentation and innovation.

THE INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS WORKSHOP (ISW) —THE CORE PROGRAM

Once these operational guidelines were established, the Ministry of Education contracted with Doug Kerr, then Staff Development Consultant at the Vancouver Vocational Institute campus of Vancouver Community College, to design the Instructional Skills Workshop, which is the core activity in the province-wide professional development program.

The Instructional Skills Workshop Program is an interlocking system of three levels of training:

1. Instructional skills training concentrates on the development of the fundamental skills of writing objectives, preparing lesson plans, and conducting instructional sessions.
2. Facilitator skills training prepares experienced instructors to conduct the Instructional Skills Workshop at their own institutions.
3. Trainer training prepares experienced ISW facilitators to lead a Facilitator Skills Workshop.

The program is based on a peer training model and is designed to be consistent with a number of precepts of lifelong learning. Doug Kerr based his design on the assumption that "the capability to effect dramatic improvement in the quality of instruction resides in the instructors currently functioning within the system" (Kerr, 1980, p. 38). The Instructional Skills Workshop Program provides an instructor with a small group setting in which to work on the improvement of his or her instructional skills and places the responsibility for learning onto the individual participant. The ISW program is based on an experiential learning model with each participant working on design

skills as well as on instructional presentation skills. During the workshop, each participant designs and conducts three "mini-lessons" and receives video feedback along with written and verbal feedback from the other workshop participants who have been learners in the mini-lesson. Participants are encouraged to prepare mini-lessons that will involve new learning for the other participants. This presents a challenge of designing for a specific audience. Much of the workshop learnings come from the participant's reflections on his or her own learning process and from developing skills in providing effective and helpful feedback to the instructor based on his or her own experience as a learner in the mini-lesson. The facilitator skills training program places a great deal of emphasis on preparing the workshop leader to manage this feedback process carefully.

The ISW workshop can be conducted in any of a variety of formats, ranging from an intensive four- or five-day workshop to a series of shorter segments offered over several weeks. The workshop is designed for a group of four to eight instructors and seems to benefit from having a group with a mix of instructional backgrounds and a range of levels of instructional experience. The workshop helps instructors identify their own strengths and weaknesses and pinpoint areas for development after the workshop.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ISW PROGRAM

Each college and institute principal was asked to identify a senior instructional manager as the ISW contact person. This contact person is the key person for the introduction of the instructor development program at the institutional level. These contact persons were invited to select one or two instructors from their own institutions to be trained as ISW facilitators. The first workshop, in August, 1979, was directed by Doug Kerr and Peter Renner, the latter being the author of *The Instructor's Survival Kit* (1983), the principal support print resource for the workshop program.

In the fall of 1979, Jim Wright, Vice Principal of

Cariboo College, requested an alternate delivery model—an on-site Facilitator Skills Workshop for a team of five instructors. This was an alternate to the centrally located training workshops to which institutions sent one or two representatives at a time. Ted Anderson and I decided to pilot this second model of facilitator training at Cariboo College in January, 1980. The on-site model provides the institution with a core team of ISW facilitators who have worked together developing their skills. This on-site model proved to be a very important factor in the successful implementation of the program. Offering the facilitator skills workshops on-site when requested has provided several advantages, including: accommodation for variation in program implementation rates, on-going visibility of the program, continual introduction of new facilitators with a high degree of enthusiasm into the system, continuing development and refinement of the program, and the development of trainer skills in a greater number of individuals (Mason & Kerr, 1981).

Since 1979, 250 participants have completed the five-day Facilitator Skills Workshop, and 46 facilitators have gone on to complete the Trainer Skills Workshop. Ted Anderson, an instructor from Vancouver Community College, was seconded to the Ministry of Education as the B.C. Provincial ISW Coordinator. He had the responsibility for conducting all of the Trainer Skills Workshops and for overseeing all of the Facilitator Skills Workshops. Ted infused the workshops with his originality and energy and substantially expanded the range of feedback and instructional techniques used within the program. His creativity was instrumental in ensuring that ISW became a dynamic and growing program.

RESPONSE TO THE PROGRAM

The effort at the provincial level was originally directed to the training of facilitators and trainers. Enthusiasm for the program at the facilitator training level has been very high. This is one important index of program success, but it is also important to look at how the program has

been adopted at the institutional level. The Ministry of Education does not directly fund the Instructional Skills Workshops, so the number of workshop participants is one important measure of the value placed by institutions on the program. Approximately 2,000 participants have now completed an ISW workshop. Many facilitators have done an outstanding job in coordinating workshops at their respective institutions and in ensuring that their colleagues have opportunities to participate in the instructional skills program at their own campuses.

While the number of participants is one good indicator of program success, it is also important to consider the satisfaction of instructors and administrators at participating institutions. Following are some sample comments from participants in the program:

—I've been teaching for about 12 years, without any kind of formal instruction in methodology, and although I thought I was doing a reasonable job, there was a secret apprehension or fear. It turned out that my co-participants were not in the least judgmental or critical, they were prepared to point out where improvements could be made, but the identification of those areas was done in such a way that I felt highly energized by the process and set out that night to put together what turned out to be a much better presentation the day after. From that point on, it was clear sailing. It was a highly enjoyable experience.

—It has really heightened an awareness of instructional technique and provided many of us with an excellent opportunity to sharpen skills and to build on skills that we previously had.

—Up until I got into the ISW, most of my professional development was technical in nature. Now I am much more aware of teaching styles and learning styles and the effective use of various training aids. I guess I am moving from being teacher-oriented to being a lot more student-oriented.

A senior administrator comments on the impact of the ISW program at his institution:

—There is a lot of willingness to look at new modes of instruction, new ways of delivering programming, and I think that's really why I have supported it as much as I have,

because we need that kind of energy and that kind of openness in the college. It is healthy having this type of group within the college and they feel quite free to drop in and talk about what's going on in their classes, and their focus is not on those difficult budgetary matters and organizational matters as much as on the quality of what's going on, what the place is all about, which is teaching and learning.

ON-GOING SUPPORT FOR FACILITATORS

Throughout the period of program implementation, there has been a strong emphasis on networking and the sharing of ideas, talents and energies across the institutions. A number of activities have helped build the network, including an ISW newsletter, the exchange of articles through a writers' network and short "refresher" workshops for college facilitator teams. We have expanded into other skills training in learning styles assessment, in one-to-one consultation work with faculty, and in offering services to instructors seeking formative evaluation from their students.

The Ministry of Education also funded a team from Capilano College to produce a series of eight videotape programs and print booklets which can be used independently or as a resource in the instructional skills program. The series was filmed at colleges and institutes throughout B.C. and provides a unique opportunity to view candid footage of many instructors in live teaching situations (Ministry of Education and Capilano College, 1982).

The Ministry of Education also sponsors an annual week-long residential leadership development program for facilitators. It provides an opportunity for facilitators to strengthen their understanding of the concepts underlying experiential instructor development activities as well as become familiar with new developments in the ISW program. The workshop is referred to as Potlatch, because our first workshop was held at Camp Potlatch, which is located at one of the original West Coast Indian Potlatch sites. The name Potlatch has particular significance for us; we find many parallels between our program and the Indian Potlatch

gift-giving tradition. Our emphasis in the program and at Potlatch is on the exchange of ideas among the facilitators and on giving away the gifts of knowledge, talent, and energy that each one has to offer. Our major outside resource person for Potlatch is Bill Bergquist, author, professor, and consultant from California. Bill has given his energy, ideas and enthusiasm to our program since its inception in 1979. He has helped keep us aware that any successful program in professional development requires attention not only to instructional development but to personal and organizational development as well. As stated by the Cariboo College Facilitators:

Our primary goal is to foster . . . a climate in which people have . . . an on-going commitment to personal, professional, and institutional growth and development. In this climate we hope that each person can become aware of the resources he can offer to others and of what they, in turn, can offer him. By highlighting the already extensive resources represented by the faculty and staff, by continuing to develop ourselves as resources, and by providing resources for others, we hope to work toward this goal. (Cariboo College ISW Facilitators, 1982, p. 1)

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The system-wide ISW program has survived for six years now. Individuals who are most active in the program are looking at what possible directions we might take in the future. Our roots are still in the ISW experiential model of "design-instruct-feedback-redesign" and the key role of the trained facilitator in managing that process. Through new opportunities, we are discovering ways to continue to keep the ISW core workshop program alive while expanding into other areas such as process facilitation of department and college-wide educational projects, assisting with formative evaluation procedures for individual instructors, and helping with orientation activities for instructors changing their programs to an individualized learning format.

If your institution is interested in the Instructional Skills Workshop as a base program for staff development

activities, we can introduce the program at your centre. Once a core group has completed the initial Facilitator Skills training, they will be ready to offer Instructional Skills Workshops to faculty on your own campus. After some workshops have been held, some of the facilitators could be selected to complete the Trainer Skills Workshop. Your local trainers would then be equipped to lead the Facilitator Skills Workshop on-site and make the ISW program self-sustaining. With ISW trainers in place, you can invite instructors from neighboring institutions to participate in Facilitator Skills Workshops, thereby broadening the system-wide base of support for staff development in your region. We can also assist with the initiation of an annual residential program patterned on the British Columbia "Potlatch" model, which would provide an on-going vehicle for maintaining and upgrading the regional ISW program and for networking among the facilitators. We have found that the Instructional Skills Workshop program has excellent potential as a base for staff development initiatives and would be pleased to have the opportunity to share our experiences with other institutions.

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