

## **Instructors' Applications from Summer Workshop on Inclusive Pedagogy**

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During the summer of 2010, approximately twenty-five faculty and graduate students from different colleges at a Midwestern university attended a four-session workshop on Inclusive Pedagogy to foster an awareness of a more diverse and learner-centered teaching environment. As evaluators of this program, we asked: Can a professional development through a short four-day workshop contribute to a change in pedagogy for those who attend? What long-term (6 months to a year) changes to teaching or course design were made? Through this study, we examined how the workshop has been applied or has influenced the participants' pedagogy in the subsequent semesters. Reviewing a combination of participants' writings, surveys, and interviews, we investigated how the instructors applied the information gained from the workshop. Some instructors had great successes; others had mixed results; and nearly everyone still felt the need to make improvements. Through this evaluation, we developed suggestions for improvement of the training and to support the instructors in their quest to become better teachers. We gained insight into how to continue the learning once the workshop is over to better ensure transfer into actual practice.

### **Introduction**

Instructors within a university setting, while being experts in their own discipline and content area, may have little formal training in pedagogy and teaching. Improvement of teaching skills is too frequently left to the instructor's own initiative. When training does occur, it is often through workshops and conferences that may excite the instructor, but the lessons may not translate into practice.

In the summer of 2010, a four-session workshop was held that focused on inclusive pedagogy and diversity. The instructors who participated in the workshop learned from a facilitator and their peers. They focused on ways to strengthen the pedagogy, diversity, and inclusion in their classrooms. Through collaborative learning the participants developed a broad understanding of privilege and diversity. During the workshop, the participants learned about using different teaching methods (not relying too much on lecture) that are more student-centered. They shared key principles to designing their classes to benefit the individual students. They discussed how negotiation of content and process may increase the democratic aspects of the classroom, thus making it more inclusive for the learners.

Each participant in the workshop was given a few short chapters to read from the text: *Teaching Inclusively* (Ouellett, 2005). The first three sessions painted the scene of inclusion and diversity in a broad brush, not being specific to any one context. In the fourth session, the participants were asked to contextualize this discussion and new learning to their own discipline and courses. They were asked to make a change or design a course that would demonstrate these new ideas. With this change or new design, they were expected to implement the change in at least one course over the following two semesters. Options were provided for continued interaction with the other participants in the workshop, but very few cared to meet again to talk

about their courses and changes. Through this research, we were able to meet and interview a number of the participants who wanted a continued conversation about their pedagogy.

We, as evaluators, followed some of the participants of the summer workshop of inclusive pedagogy over the next school year (2010-2011) to gain insight into how the instructors extended their learning and incorporated changes into their classrooms. We also asked what other steps could have been taken to ensure the long-term benefits of the workshop. Through this study, we are able to examine both what worked and what was lacking to improve the professional development practices of adult education.

The research questions included: Can a short four-day professional development workshop contribute to a change in pedagogy? After this seminar, were teachers more aware of diversity in their own classroom? What changes to teaching or course design were made in the following two semesters? What was the response to these changes?

### **Methodology**

We used Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick's four levels of evaluation (2007) as our theoretical evaluation framework. Using Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, we were able to assess four levels of evaluation: reactions, learning, behavior, and results. We collected data through document analysis, a survey, and selected interviews. Of the twenty-five faculty and graduate students (including one of the evaluators) who participated in the summer workshop, nineteen developed lesson plans to show how they would implement ideas from the workshop. These were collected and reviewed for depth and scale of changes. Approximately four months after the workshop, we sent out surveys to the twenty-five participants, asking if and in what ways the workshop had enhanced their teaching. Ten participants responded to the survey. We subsequently interviewed seven self-selected participants with open-ended questions that were developed in response to the survey that they had completed.

Compiling, coding, and analyzing this data for common themes and categories (Miles & Huberman, 1994) allowed us to understand the strengths of this program and possible improvements for the future. We also were able to take the lessons learned to suggest improvements for other professional development opportunities.

### **Literature Review**

Learning fads come and go in higher education. Faculty members and instructors often attend workshops and conferences to learn about new methods of teaching, only to return to their classrooms to realize they are not certain how to implement these changes. They may not find tangible support from administrators or colleagues willing to assist them in this quest. Even when leaders of a university support specific educational changes through sponsored seminars, there is no guarantee of long-term success. "The main problem is not the absence of innovation in schools, but rather the presence of too many disconnected, episodic, fragmented, superficially adorned projects" (Fullan, 2001, p. 21).

Workshops often are offered with little, if any, follow-up support. Since instructors participating in professional development are learners too, it would be helpful to have an opportunity in a safe environment to practice new skills. Without this support, they may not find the confidence or incentive to try these ideas in their classes. If they do try to make changes which do not seem successful, they may not try them again (Cutler & Ruoff, 1999).

[I]t takes a much more intensive, ongoing coaching component to help teachers achieve the level of change...Most teachers need regular feedback and help in order to become expert practitioners of new pedagogical strategies...Second, teachers need to feel part of the larger teaching community in their schools as they pursue changes in their teaching...Third, teachers need support over the long term in their pursuit of change toward investigative, student-centered teaching. (Culter. & Ruopp, 1999, pp. 159-160)

Working within the education world, Fullan (2001) found that “professional learning communities or collaborative work cultures...are critical for the implementation of attempted reforms” (p. 74). Professional learning communities come in a variety of forms and settings.

Levine (2010) describes four common formats for teacher collaborative learning: inquiry community; teacher professional community; community of learners; and community of practice. A professional learning community for educators focuses on: “the social norms, practices, beliefs, and degree of shared trust that teachers develop together... The norms that groups develop can have a powerful impact on what individuals will and will not do” (p. 115).

Each of Levine’s (2010) communities are connected, yet, they each serve a different purpose. Inquiry communities encourage public reflection and research on their teaching. Communities of learners posit everyone involved in an educational setting (students, instructors, and administrators) as learners. Whereas, in a community of practice, individuals with a shared commitment to a practice, like inclusiveness, support each other as they seek ways to foster this ideal in the classroom.

Fullan (2001) explains that collegiality can indicate success, yet significant change in “beliefs, teaching style, and materials...can come about only through a process of personal development in a social context” (p. 124). He believes that a learning community is effective in promoting change because it “combines pressure and support in a seamless way” (p. 91).

While faculty and institutions benefit from teacher communities, educational reformers should not rely on these communities to sustain themselves. Teachers may learn together, however, they may still benefit from a facilitator who has experience and more knowledge in the reform area.

## **Results**

According to Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick (2006), there are four levels of evaluation: the reactions of the participants to the training; the learning that took place for the participants; the ability of the participants to use this new knowledge on the job; and the results of the training.

Overall the reactions of participants, which were collected through surveys and interviews, to the training was positive: instructors felt the workshop expanded their ideas on inclusivity, were inspired and renewed by contact with peers and the sharing of ideas. The participants also felt that they benefited from the information provided by workshop facilitator, the textbook, and especially the sharing by the community of learners. The four-day workshop format was well attended and met the timelines for participants to reflect on their learning and develop application for the future. Learning was demonstrated through their lesson plans and their insights into how the changes affected their students.

As evaluators, we were able to collect data after the participants were able to implement change into their courses, noting both transfer of learning and change in behaviors. We discovered which activities and philosophies the instructors actually used in their classrooms. Behavior changes also included a combination of the instructors’ own critical reflection on their

teaching and their adapted curriculum. We begin to touch on evaluating larger results as we review the responses they collected from their students, but seeing organizational change is not as directly observed.

Central to our interest for this paper is the transfer of learning and personal results of the training. Participants of the workshop were required to develop a plan of action in writing about a change they would make in one course. In order to receive pay for attending the workshop, they had to turn these in to the workshop facilitator. We wanted to know how, and if, instructors were able to transfer their learning into the classroom. Some of the seminar participants, particularly graduate students, had not yet implemented any changes when we sent the survey because they were going to focus on a particular class in the spring. Of the six who made changes in the fall semester, three felt the changes were favorable and two felt that there were mixed results and wanted to make changes the next time they taught the class. One mentioned the changes made but did not really answer how these changes impacted the students. Additionally, one of the interviewees who did not send in the survey told us, "I was so fulfilled. My reviews are great. There are just so many positive comments."

One key principle to inclusive pedagogy is to recognize the differences in students and to find ways to reach them. Many of the participants focused on becoming more aware of these differences, and they learned more about the students in order to better tailor that particular class. Instructors sought ways to help broaden the worlds their students lived in through lessons and projects designed to expand their awareness of diverse groups of people. Techniques for creating an inclusive pedagogy in the classroom were numerous. Some instructors focused on helping students to learn to think critically about the theories in the textbooks. Others supplemented these more traditional ideas with more representative viewpoints through supplemental readings or film. One instructor used films in her class because of the power of story to show how people from other cultures live. Then the students presented group projects on what they learned.

Instructors were also taught that they can relinquish some of their control in the classroom. They discussed sharing cognitive authority with the students through negotiation of projects, placing less emphasis on teacher-centered lecturing, and taking care when grading subjective material that there is not only one correct response. This way the students can express a perspective that is different from the instructor without necessarily being wrong.

To determine the results of their instructional changes, faculty gathered evaluation data for the results through structured student feedback, individual discussions with students at different points throughout semester, learning journals and learning contracts, clicker response system (for questions that are personal or controversial), and other methods. Also instructors engaged in reflection of the results of their new teaching efforts as they revised changes or reflected on success or lack of success for some of the activities. Overall, our participants found the changes they made benefited their students and improved the classes they taught. Many of them still felt they needed to make adjustments but this is part of being reflective of practice.

We asked participants what they needed to better succeed in these changes. Most of them felt a network of peers would benefit them but they emphasized that this needed to be voluntary. Also some members expressed the need for more training, perhaps subsequent workshops that focused on particular skills and techniques to develop inclusivity.

## Conclusion

We found that a short four-day professional development workshop can contribute to a change in pedagogy. The instructors became more aware of diversity in their own classroom after this seminar. Many were aware of diversity when they entered the seminar, but the workshop helped to expand their understanding of inclusion.

While the workshop was helpful to reflect and reconsider pedagogy in one's own course, a single workshop cannot stand alone. We found that one of the most beneficial aspects of this workshop was that participants were required to reflect on what they learned and develop a plan of action for one class. This was not an overwhelming task, since it only focused on one change in one area for the following year. The participants had to put this plan in writing with the commitment and expectation that they would implement it.

The facilitator also offered to observe the participants in their classrooms to offer more individual help. Some instructors may not feel comfortable asking a colleague to visit their classroom or they may forget the offer or feel it is too much trouble. However, for better success, there could be more follow-up through continued discussion groups or even a subsequent workshop. Peer groups could also allow for more self-reflection as the participants talk through their successes and difficulties or listen to other instructors' stories. We suggest that, in addition to a written plan of action, the participants should agree to belong to a peer group for the following year as they implement the change. This should also be followed up with other optional workshops that focus on more specific topics of inclusivity and strategies.

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