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## Making workshops work for you

*Here's how to ensure those new ideas get put into practice*

*By Joan Richardson*

**H**as this happened to you? You enthusiastically sign up to attend a conference session or workshop on a topic that interests you. You scribble page after page of notes with every intention of going home and incorporating these new and exciting ideas into your work.

But once you're back at school, it's business as usual. Before you know it, those workshop notes are collecting dust and you've hardly used those new ideas.

If this sounds familiar, you're not alone.

"People get swept up in the day-to-day reality once they get back to their schools. Despite their very good intentions, they rarely find the time to come back to their notes from conferences or workshops," admitted Pam Robbins, an independent educational consultant.

Research by Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers indicates that training that stops at the workshop doesn't lead to putting new ideas into practice at home. In order for new ideas to begin to take hold, there must be follow-up to a workshop, they say.

When there is no follow-up, Joyce and Showers believe that fewer than 10 percent of the participants will implement their new ideas in their schools. The greater the number of participants from each school, the greater the likelihood that new ideas will be implemented, according to Joyce and Showers.

### SEEING THE END

To ensure that teachers and principals make

good use of workshops and conferences, they need to know ahead of time what they expect to learn and how they expect to use what they learn.

Dale Hair, who runs the Louisiana Principal Internship program, suggests asking this question before making plans to attend any workshop or conference: What will I learn that will benefit the students in my school?

Hair also suggests that anyone attending a workshop knows what product or service they will be expected to provide as a result of attending that workshop. "That calls for a little more trouble on the part of the principal but I know principals who get a lot of bang for the buck because they do this ahead of time," she said.

For example, she recalls a time when she and another teacher attended a staff development workshop on space exploration. They were expected to return from that workshop and create a series of lessons for their students based on what they learned.

The end of a conference or workshop is the time to ask a similar question. Sybil Yastrow, director of the NSDC Academy, says she often recommends that participants consider this question: "What are we going to do as a result of our learning? What is the one thing you are going to do differently in your classroom?"

### GOING IN PAIRS

Another strategy for using workshops and con-

*Continued on Page 2*

*Staff Development*

# Making workshops work for you

*Continued from Page One*

ferences more effectively is to send at least two persons.

“I like the buddy system. It helps support the implementation of something because there’s more than one person that has that knowledge. Even though we have heard the same thing, we may have gotten different ideas,” Hair said.

Hair also believes that a message delivered by two participants who attended the same workshop is received more favorably than the same message from just one person.

Robbins often has participants write a letter to themselves about what they’ll do when they return to their schools. Then, they put the letter into a sealed, self-addressed envelope and give it to a colleague who is attending the workshop. The colleague is asked to mail the letter to them after they return home.

“It’s a good memory jogger. It provides an avenue for a continuing dialogue so the workshop doesn’t end at 3:30 on that final day but rather carries over to the workplace,” Robbins said.

## DEBRIEFING SESSIONS

The St. Vrain Valley school district in Longmont, Colorado, has devised a plan for making conference participation more effective. Brenda Kaylor, supervisor of staff development, calls it “accelerated learning-conference style.”

1. Before a conference, focus groups form at each school and at the district level to generate questions and learning goals for the participants.

2. Then, participants select the conference sessions they believe will help them learn something related to the goals.

3. Conference registration is completed as a team, with each person committing to attending certain sessions.

4. During the conference, participants have daily debriefing sessions immedi-

## BEFORE YOU GO ...

Educators in St. Vrain Valley Schools in Longmont, Colorado, answer a set of questions as they make plans for attending conferences. These questions guide them in selecting which conferences sessions to attend. They also help keep them focused on what they want to learn as they attend those sessions.

- What do we need to learn? How do we know that?
- What are the specific questions we will focus on as we seek information?
- How are the questions ultimately tied to increased student achievement?
- How will we reconnect with our building after attending this conference?
- What data will we gather and use to guide our efforts?

**Source:** Brenda Kaylor, St. Vrain Valley Schools, Longmont, Colorado.

ately following the last afternoon session. Typically, the debriefings last 90 minutes. The facilitator changes each day, and each facilitator deliberately structures the debriefings differently.

To encourage networking, conference participants from outside their district are frequently invited to join these debriefings.

5. The participants create a notebook from handouts and notes taken in the sessions they found most helpful. Each participant receives a copy of the notebook as a reference tool.

6. As needed, presentations are prepared for school and district groups based on what was learned at the conference.

“This model is almost guaranteed to wear us out mentally during the confer-

ence, but we won’t give it up. By articulating why what we learned is a match for our district, we have a much deeper understanding of what we’ve learned,” Kaylor said.

“We find that we are able to transfer more of what we learn at conferences to our schools and district than we ever did when we attended a conference alone,” she said.

## SHARING IDEAS BACK HOME

Since not all teachers in a school can attend every conference, schools must find ways for participants to share what they’ve learned with others. This benefits both those who attended and those who didn’t.

The Colorado Staff Development Council, for example, runs a mini-conference after its members return from the National Staff Development Council Annual Conference. Every CSDC member spends 15 to 20 minutes sharing what he or she learned during a single session.

In addition, CSDC’s first newsletter after the annual NSDC conference includes brief summations of all of the sessions attended by its members. That enables members who cannot attend the in-state mini-conference to share in the learning.

Faculty meetings can be used in a similar way. Principals can set aside time at the beginning of the year to allow teachers to talk about what they learned during summer institutes, summer reading, or attendance at various workshops.

Later, principals can build in time at every faculty meeting for teachers to share what they’re learning.

Yastrow believes it’s productive to encourage each person to stand up and verbally commit to how they plan to change their work as a result of what they’ve learned. Writing it down is also a good way for them to remember their commitment, she said. She even recommends that participants write this into their planner so they see it every day.

# Thinking ahead

It's helpful to focus on what you want to learn before attending any seminar/workshop or reading any book or viewing an educational videotape. This exercise should help you prepare for learning as well as help you evaluate the experience when it is concluded.

## Directions

### BEFORE THE SESSION, ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

1. How will attending this conference/workshop benefit the students in my school?

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2. What do I expect to learn at this conference session/workshop? What questions do I want to have answered by attending this conference session/workshop?

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### AFTER THE SESSION, ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS:

1. What did I learn from this conference session/workshop?

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2. How will I use what I have learned?

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*T*  
*The learning comes  
 not from the activity*

*but thinking about*

*the activity.*

— *Unknown*

# Structured response sheet

*Copy this page and take it with you into each workshop, class, or seminar session you attend this summer. You can also adapt this and use it to guide your thinking about what you read during the summer or at other times of the year.*

*Rather than make this a one-use activity, plan to compile these response sheets in a three-ring binder. That will enable you to return to them again and again as reminders of what you have learned.*

**TITLE OF PRESENTATION/WORKSHOP/AUTHOR:** \_\_\_\_\_

**AUTHOR(S) OR PRESENTER(S):** \_\_\_\_\_

**1.** What did this author/researcher/presenter say about curriculum, assessment, or instruction? What recommendations are made or can be inferred in terms of knowledge, skills, or processes?

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**2.** What do we know about the conditions under which these recommendations or findings were developed? For example, student demographics, size of school, resources available, support provided, etc.?

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**3.** What implications does this have for our school? Do we want to consider implementing these recommendations? What modifications might we have to make in order to implement these recommendations in our school?

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**4.** What questions were raised for you?

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**5.** What tells you that this is a credible source that provides high quality information?

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

# School visitation

**NAME OF SCHOOL:** \_\_\_\_\_

**NAME OF PRINCIPAL:** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE OF VISIT:** \_\_\_\_\_

*The purpose of this school visitation is to gather information about:*

\_\_\_\_\_

1. How did the principal and teachers gain support for this change?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. How did the principal and teachers deal with specific problems during implementation?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. How are the principal and teachers working together to maintain the momentum of their efforts?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS**

1. What have you learned about the process of school improvement?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. How will you use this information in your school?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. What outcome do you hope to achieve in your school?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Visiting a school is a useful way to learn how other principals and teachers have implemented ideas being considered in your own school. This tool will help you as you gather information during such school visits.*

*Source: Adapted from material provided by the Louisiana Principal Internship, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.*

# Round-robin interviewing

**COMMENTS TO THE FACILITATOR:** This activity could be used at the beginning of the school year to encourage teachers to share what they have learned during the summer.

## Directions

1. Divide a group into pairs. Each pair will have an interviewer and an interviewee.
2. The interviewer will question the other person and make notes from the responses. Time: 15 minutes.
3. Reverse the process, with the interviewee becoming the interviewer. Time: 15 minutes.
4. During a public presentation of what has been learned, the interviewers share with the group what his/her interviewee learned. Each interviewer should answer this question: How does the interviewee plan to use what was learned during the conference/workshop/summer? Time: 30 minutes.

*T*  
*To teach is to*  
*learn twice.*

—*Joseph Joubert*



*Round-robin interviewing could be used at the beginning of the school year to encourage teachers to share what they have learned during the summer.*

# Learning about staff development

■ **Achieving your vision of professional development** by SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE). Pulls together the most current research on professional development and change. A "how to" resource that reviews the stages of building an effective professional development system. Stock #B56. To order, call NSDC at (800) 727-7288 or (513) 523-6029 or fax (513) 523-0638. Price: \$12.50, non-members; \$10, members.

■ **Designing professional development for teachers of science and mathematics** by Susan Loucks-Horsley, et al. Presents ideas for a professional development framework and vignettes from real schools. Includes 15 essential strategies to help teachers become and remain effective educators. Will help you identify the professional development needs of your staff, create learning opportunities that go beyond traditional inservice programs and provide resources for teachers' further training. Stock # B51. To order, call NSDC at (800) 727-7288 or (513) 523-6029 or fax (513) 523-0638. Price: \$36.50, non-members; \$29.20, members.

■ **New vision for staff development** by Dennis Sparks and Stephanie Hirsh. De-

scribes the ideas that drive the new vision of staff development. Each chapter includes an overview of concepts, case studies of school systems, and schools putting theory into practice. Stock #B50. To order, call NSDC at (800) 727-7288 or (513) 523-6029 or fax (513) 523-0638. Price: \$22.45, non-members; \$17.97, members.

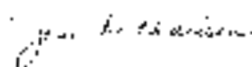
■ **Standards for staff development** by the National Staff Development Council. Intended to be used by schools and districts to improve the quality of their staff development efforts so student learning will be increased. Study guides for elementary, middle, and high school are published separately. Trainer's kits and videos also are available. To order, call NSDC at (800) 727-7288 or (513) 523-6029 or fax (513) 523-0638. Price per study guide: \$15, non-members; \$12, members.

■ **Student achievement through staff development** by Bruce Joyce and Beverly Showers. (White Plains, NY: Longman Publishers, 1995.) A comprehensive guide to staff development. Overriding theme is that educator growth is the key to student growth. Emphasizes staff development as "inquiry." ISBN 0-8013-0782-1. To order, call (800) 552-2259 or (416) 447-5101. Price: \$31.50.

## See you next fall!

This is the last issue of *Tools for Schools* for the 1998-99 school year. We've had two very successful years of *Tools* so far. Our third year will begin in August with an issue on developing norms.

We would welcome hearing about topics you'd like us to explore next year. Please send your suggestions to me at NSDCJoan@aol.com or by mail to 1128 Nottingham Road, Grosse Pointe Park, MI 48230.



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# Ask Dr. Developer



**Dr. Developer has all the answers to questions that staff developers ask. (At least he thinks he does!)**

## Examine student needs when selecting staff development

**Q** *Our school has limited resources. We've had some bad experiences in the past when teachers attended workshops that did not meet our needs. How do you select the best conference/workshop?*

**A** Probably no staff development decision is more important than selecting learning opportunities that pay off in student learning. To justify the time, energy, and money invested, staff development should be research-based and/or proven in practice, be relevant to the school, make sense to the teacher, and be compatible with other practices currently in place or being considered.

We need to move away from a system in which teachers individually choose what they would find interesting to learn. We need to move toward a system in which teachers' learning is focused on school goals for student learning.

Consider these steps for selecting staff development:

**1.** Collect, organize, and analyze data on student performance and other aspects of school functioning (such as attendance, participation in certain courses, parental

support, etc.).

**2.** Examine the gaps between what the data indicates and what is desired.

**3.** Describe those gaps in clear language and determine their possible causes.

**4.** Identify the staff development content that would address the causes of the problems.

**5.** Select the content that:

- Has the greatest potential for addressing the problem and improving student learning;

- Has the support to ensure that the ideas gained will be implemented; and

- Has strong advocates at the school and district level.

**6.** Identify clearly the expectations for each workshop or conference that is approved.

**7.** Educate teachers about what they are expected to bring home from each workshop or conference. Be clear on how you expect them to share what they have learned.

**8.** As you plan for attendance at workshops or conferences, also plan for follow-up to ensure that teachers are able to change their behavior based on their new knowledge.

**9.** Evaluate the success of each staff development opportunity in terms of its contributions toward your school or district's learning goals.

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