Chapter 30
The MORE Model for Faculty Development

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ABSTRACT

For many faculty the integration of technology and learner-centered teaching strategies or the adoption of instructional "best practices" represents innovation and change. The author visited fifteen research intensive university faculty development centers, looking at what they considered best practices with regard to improving instruction. The practices and programs described had one or more of the following components: Motivation, Opportunity, Resources and Evaluation, what I am calling here the MORE model. This paper discusses these four factors important to instructional change agents. The paper ends with a list of implications, based on the model, for that would enable faculty development centers to have more control over the factors that are important to faculty success and systemic change.

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of books on how to improve teaching, integrate technology into teaching and learning, engage students in collaborative learning, teach large classes, and other strategies that are frequently the topics of faculty development workshops. Many times the techniques written about in these books are referred to as "best practices" in teaching and learning. The question I deal with in this paper is what constitutes a best practice? What

do faculty developers in other universities find to be best practices, and how do you engage faculty, at a research extensive university, in using innovative practices to improve their instruction?

BACKGROUND

In most institutions of higher learning there is an agency, office, or center whose role it is to help teaching assistants, faculty and adjunct faculty with their teaching skills, for the purpose of this paper I will call these organizations Faculty Development. For

the most part, Faculty Development is focused on the improvement of teaching within the organization. Faculty members study how to do research in their doctoral programs, but they don't, as a rule, study pedagogical skills associated with teaching. By teaching I mean constructing, delivering, and managing a course, in the classroom, on-line, or a blend of the two. Pedagogical research within a discipline is often referred to as the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL). A slightly broader view of faculty development includes support of SoTL, which includes an orientation aimed at research on teaching methods that may have utility for professors at other institutions.

Faculty development centers have different names at different universities. At one university it might be the Center for 21st Century Teaching Excellence, at another it might be the Office of Teaching Effectiveness and Innovation, at my university it is the Center for Teaching and Learning. In fact, determining who and what agency at a university deals with the topic of faculty development is often a challenge in itself, and although they would all agree their job is faculty development, none of the centers use the term "faculty development" in their titles.

In general only a small percentage of faculty members at my university participate in formal faculty development activities. In my role as the faculty development coordinator for a large southeastern university, I was interested in what was happening at faculty development centers in other universities, especially research extensive universities, where publish or perish is the guiding principle of career development. While on sabbatical during the fall semester 2005, I visited fifteen different universities, (Wager, 2005). While this might be very loosely called a qualitative study, it is probably more a set of reflections on interviews and observations made during the visits., These reflections shaped the development of a model of factors that facilitate innovation.

BEST PRACTICES IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

Best practices for teaching and learning are popular topics of discussion at faculty development conferences. In addition, "best practices" are commonly the topic of posts on list-services like POD (http://podnetwork.org). In response to queries about the best use of laptops, podcasts, or whatever the technology, many inspired list-serve subscribers freely share their knowledge and information about what is happening at their universities or provide links to activities or practices they have found at other universities. In the fall semester of 2005, I had the opportunity to take a sabbatical to visit fifteen universities, in order to take a closer look at how best practices are defined, and the context in which they are being used. This was an enlightening experience because seeing a program in operation gives you a far better feel for what it takes to make a successful practice than just reading a description of that practice.

My finding is that there are no such things as best practices – at least not ones that just can be "found and adopted" by other universities. Instead best practices are the context (course and resource) specific constructions of individual instructors within their institutions and their curriculum. I think we would be further ahead if we dropped the modifier "best" and simply look at instructional practices as alternative strategies that may or may not work in other situations. In addition, it is uncommon to find any evidence that "best practices" actually lead to quantitative (or even qualitative) improvements in student learning. Evidence of best practices is generally supported by anecdotal evidence from the students or teachers that the practice (whatever it was), improved interest in the course, but rarely are there measures of effects on learning outcomes. For example, in 2004, Gibbs and Coffey did one of the first studies of the effects of teacher training programs

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