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ABSTRACT

W. James Popham suggests that instructional development will die on college and university campuses due to the lack of sufficient commitment. In light of this, this article traces the development and implementation of an instructional development program in Nebraska that uses a consortium approach. Discussion revolves around the consortium, design of the program, selection of faculty for program inclusion, and faculty seminars. Popham's admonition is emphasized, and considerations are proposed to help insure the successful implementation of instructional development at colleges and universities. (Author)

INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR COLLEGES: Case Study of a Consortium Approach

Abstract

The article begins with a statement by W. James Popham suggesting that instructional development will die on college and university campuses. Further, he suggests that the lack of sufficient commitment is the cause. The major body of the article traces the development and implementation of an instructional development program from the perspective of consortium approach. Discussion revolves around the consortium, design of the program, selection of faculty for program inclusion, and Faculty Seminars. The article closes with a restatment of Popham's admonition and proposes considerations to help insure the successful implementation of instructional development on campuses of colleges and universities.

A recent article by W. James Popham raised the question, "Will instructional improvement become an integral part of any effectively functioning institution of advanced learning? Current adds favor the faddish demise... the cause of death will likely turn out to be insufficient commitment."[1] Although the final answer will not be available for several years, the intent of this article is to report the efforts of one instructional development program created through a consortium of colleges as a result of federal funding.

The consortium was composed of nine public and private colleges within the state of Nebraska whose membership is characterized as having a liberal arts orientation. The members were: Chadron State College, College of St. Mary, Dana College, Doane College, Hastings College, Midland Lutheran College, Peru State College, Wayne State College and York College. Higher education in Nebraska has not had a great deal of broad cooperative effort in the past and this consortium marks a major milestone toward this venture.

The original purposes of the consortium focused around the development and utilization of instructional television organized through the Nebraska Educational Television Council of Higher Education (NETCHE). While earlier efforts were solely in the field of instructional television, NETCHE became the organizational vehicle through which a variety of other kinds of activities began appearing for the benefit of the colleges, both individually and collectively.

Major guidance of NETCHE and NETCHE-related activities evolved from meetings held by the academic deans from each of the nine institutions. These meetings are designed to discuss mutual concerns and identify mutual problems. As a result of these deans' meetings, programs were de-

signed to meet the needs of the collective body. Some of the programs included: the Visiting Minority Scholars Program, the Field Engineer Service Program and the Developmental Studies Program. These meetings were extremely important because they served as a vehicle of change. Mayhew recognized the importance of the dean when he wrote: "... the academic vice-president has the responsibility for being the principal change agent."[2] Eble indicated that it is the dean's office which has the major responsibility for initiating, implementing and maintaining an instructional development program.[3]

During one of the frequent meetings of the 1973-74 academic year, a new need was expressed by the deans; this need being the development and funding of an Instructional Development Program designed to serve all of the colleges. In order to establish this program, the Executive Director of NETCHE was given the initial assignment to prepare a request for Federal assistance. When the consortium received a grant, it became the responsibility of the newly hired coordinator to implement the program. Since the coordinator was an individual who was not a member of any of the consortium schools, and yet, was familiar with each of the institutions, he had the following advantages:

A. He could not easily be sterotyped by the faculty nor accused of alignment with any factions.

B. He had a relatively objective perspective because of lack of allegience to a particular school.

C. He was basically independent of the informal power structure on each of the campuses.[4]

Four assumptions under which the Instructional Development Program operated during the 1974-75 academic year were:

1. People have integrity, will work hard toward objectives to which they are committed and will respond to self-control and self-direction as they pursue their objectives.
2. There exists a capacity to exercise a high degree of imagination, ingenuity, and creativity in the solution of problems among the participants in the program.
3. The participant in the program, under the proper conditions, is not only capable of accepting, but will seek responsibility.
4. Work is natural to an adult and under the proper conditions he will respond by completing the activities to which he has committed himself.[5]

Further, there are five motivational factors on which the program was based which served as reinforcement for faculty participation. These were: (1) opportunity for achievement, (2) opportunity to receive recognition, (3) opportunity for fulfilling work, (4) opportunity to assume responsibility and (5) possible opportunity for advancement.[6]

Following the establishment of the assumptions and motivation forces, major consideration was focused on the selection of faculty. Much of the literature on instructional development in higher education concerning the selection of the faculty tends to revolve around three broad groups. According to Eble, the three groups might be "the beginning faculty members, those in mid-career, and those close to retirement."[7] Popham also defines three groups:

A. The skilled teachers "who need little, if any, instructional assistance."

B. "Those professors who are not particularly effective instructors, but, given reasonable attractive incentives, would be willing to effect substantial change to increase their teaching skills."

C. "Those professors who, though ineffectual, are either

> (1) openly contemptuous of programs designed to ameliorate their instructional inadequacies or (2) too fearful to declare their own weaknesses. Such professors will actively resist any change in their present instructional practices."[8]

Popham's model is more generally accepted and it suggests that major emphasis be directed toward the second group. Because of difficulties associated with a consortium effort in terms of visibility -- not being located on campus -- it was felt that an advantage would be gained by using those faculty members who were generally considered excellent (group one). It was assumed that their participation and successful completion would produce program visibility through conversations with their colleagues. It was anticipated that this type of visibility would evoke a number of questions raised by non-participants and answered by both the dean and the participating faculty. In other words, it was hoped that participating faculty would articulate most positive expressions to their colleagues.

One additional criterion, aside from being an excellent teacher, consisted of the judgmental requirement that each faculty participant be politically powerful and influential with his colleagues. Havelock identifies these individuals as the "opinion leaders."[9] This judgment was made by the deam from each of the respective campuses.

Since it was impossible for the coordinator to be on each campus daily, an individual from each of the respective campuses was designated as the campus coordinator. His qualifications were the same as those of the participants, with one additional qualification, although it was not universally met. It was suggested to the deans that the campus coordinator be a member of the division or department of education. This was designed to facilitate the implementation of the program because of his presumed familiarity with the instructional development concept,

particularly as practiced in elementary and secondary level schools. For those campus coordinators not specifically from a department of education, it was requested that the dean identify an individual who had considerable interest in instructional development for higher education.

Generally, each dean selected approximately four or five faculty persons to participate in the program. In two instances, three or four small committees were formed on the respective campuses instead of the selection of individuals. This was done to increase the influence of the program to as many faculty members as possible.

In order to facilitate the campus coordinator's job, or at least allow him the necessary time to speak with each participant frequently, he was given approximately one-fourth reduced teaching responsibility. His responsibilities for the program included the coordination of and responsibility for the $1900 allotted to each campus for its respective instructional development activities. The $1900 was earmarked for the purchase of materials directly related to the projects being developed by each of the individuals or committees in the program. (The committee format will hereafter be referred to as individual.) The campus coordinator was to divide the monies as equitably as possible and make adjustments where appropriate and with consent of the participants. In effect, the faculty and the campus coordinator had complete responsibility for the monies. The technique of allowing the faculty and the campus coordinator to assume the responsibility for the monies proved to be desirable because it helped get the campus coordinator involved in assisting with the development of the faculty instructional development projects.

The major role of the program coordinator was to "focus on building identification of and commitment to worthwhile objectives in the work

context and upon building mutual trust and respect in the interpersonal context..."[10] That is, it was deemed important that the coordinator spend his time developing positive relationships and getting commitment from the faculty members to complete a project which they determined to be most appropriate to their needs. Rubin suggests that "...the task...is not to remake the teacher according to a pre-determined mold, but rather to capitalize upon the natural attributes which exist."[11]

Through frequent contacts (once each two-week period during fall), finalization of the projects became clear and work began toward the completion of the commitments. The rationale behind this frequent contact was based on one assumption: Faculty in the small liberal arts-oriented college tend to have a relatively heavy teaching load. Therefore, they need to have gentle reminders thus insuring project completion.

To validate this assumption, a mid-year evaluation form was mailed to each participant in the program asking his opinion relative to the value of the coordinator's regular visit. The responses indicated that the two-week period was about right and that it served as a subtle reminder that each had made a commitment toward which he was progressing.

In addition to the establishment of goals toward which each faculty person worked, the coordinator attempted to respond to each request for assistance as quickly as possible. Assistance took the form of locating information and appropriate resources, and making arrangements to insure the completion of tasks requiring special facilities not found on the respective campus. For example, data processing, film reproduction, and videotape reproduction were among some of the tasks. As a generalized rule, the attempt was made to do everything possible which would make the faculty person's project less complicated while at the same time

not allowing development of a dependency on the coordinator.

An interesting phenomenon was related to the variety of disciplines represented by the faculty participating in the Instructional Development Program. Virtually all of the different major disciplines were represented with the result that projects became characterized by diversity in scope and in content. To provide a feeling for the flavor of this diversification, brief descriptions of several projects are given below:

A. One college organized a multiple committee structure in which one committee developed and implemented an interdisciplinary course on communication. Another committee from this college took upon itself the task of conducting a college-wide student evaluation relative to faculty teaching performances.

B. In another college possessing the committee structure, one committee developed a faculty in-service program on the improvement of teacher made tests. This in-service program was implemented on the campus on two different occasions and once during a Faculty Seminar (the Faculty Seminar concept will be described later).

C. One faculty person developed an astronomy course for the interim session held at his college. The course was shaped around the Keller Plan[12] to an extent permitted by the restrictions imposed when teaching during an interim period.

D. An individual developed and utilized media (transparencies, 8mm movies, and slides) to improve his teaching a course on statistics.

E. A faculty person of one college developed an independent study format for his art appreciation course. This new format used synchronized slide/tape units and instructional television units in place of the previously used lecture method.

F. One woman, teaching a freshman composition course, utilized a tech-

nique to increase the construction and continuity of writing through slide units. The technique involved students' making slides which "tell a story." These "stories" were then transferred to the written medium by the student. The basic idea behind this method is to help the student transfer the visual interpretation of his world into the written word.

G. Finally, a faculty person developed a slide/tape unit on Norse mythology which she used as part of her literature classes. This unit was also placed in the library for use by other students and to serve as review by the members of her classes.

These descriptions are provided as a sampling of the breadth of topics which were developed as a result of the Instructional Development Program.

One assumption, not previously mentioned, concerns the belief that there exists a tremendous reservoir of talent among the faculty within the colleges served by the program. Based on this assumption, and that faculty have a need to get together to discuss mutual concerns about teaching and learning, a special series of activities were developed entitled "Faculty Seminars."

The Faculty Seminar was designed to use the talents existing in the colleges by capitalizing on the projects developed as part of the program. Specifically, four seminars were conducted having the following themes:

A. "Teacher-Made Testing and Assessment,"

B. "Individualized Approach to Art Appreciation,"

C. "Individualized Learning for Business,"

D. "Computer Applications in the Classroom for Non-Computer People."

All faculty members from the consortium colleges were invited to participate in the Faculty Seminar of their choice. Few of the Faculty

in the consortium have had the opportunity to visit other campuses; therefore, an attempt was made to conduct the seminars on campuses within the consortium rather than at the NETCHE offices.

The beauty of the Faculty Seminar strategy was that through project development, custom-made for the needs of the individual and his discipline, a ready source of expertise became available to stimulate information dissemination and the sharing of ideas. In turn, individuals who participated in the Faculty Seminars became likely candidates for inclusion in the program for the following year. It is felt that the combination of this selection process with additional recommendations from current participants and the academic deans will produce a list of faculty who might benefit from the program in succeeding years.

The net result of this year's program realized a direct impact on approximately one-seventh of the total faculty in the consortium of nine colleges. This is based on the fact that out of approximately 650 faculty persons teaching at the colleges, fifty individuals were involved in the development of the projects and about fifty individuals participated in the Faculty Seminars.

One final issue remains and it concerns assisting the faculty participants with the development of their instructional projects. Much effort was expended to accomplish two things: first, secure appropriate resource materials for the members of the faculty who were working on their respective projects. This resource material was generally in the form of technical articles on instructional development or descriptions of similar kinds of endeavors developed elsewhere. The second was related to making a careful assessment of establishing where the faculty person was with respect to his knowledge about teaching practices and/or development of instructional materials and then guide him from this established

point to a new level of competence and understanding. The central concern was with helping this individual to grow in ways most suited to his needs as defined by the goals which he set for himself. This was the critical part in the whole process: establishment of goals for his professional growth. Rubin provided an admonition with respect to this concern when he wrote about the faculty development in elementary and secondary schools. "The typical program makes little allowance for individuality..."[13] Higher education should not replicate this error.

"Will instructional improvement become an integral part of any effectively functioning institution of advanced learning? Current odds favor the faddish demise...the cause of death will likely turn out to be insufficient commitment."

This was the opening thesis of the article and I would like to add the following. The evidence provided from the Instructional Development Program suggests that commitment (administrative and financial) alone is not sufficient without two important considerations. First, faculty attitudes must be shaped through a carefully devised strategy designed to gradually build an atmosphere favoring the importance of improving teaching. Second, there must be, through gradual accumulation of hard evidence, such as that developed as a result of the program, information showing that efforts directed toward the improvement of teaching realize increased student performances.

Finally, one must consider the importance of time, time to allow a program to work and bear fruit without having detractors attack the program prematurely. Therefore, before embarking on a course of instructional improvement among faculty within higher education, it is imperative that at least a firm four or five-year program be outlined, funded, staffed and implemented to realize the desired benefits. At the conclusion of

this time frame, sufficient empirical evidence will be available from more than two-thirds of the faculty on which to base decision making. The odds will most likely favor continuation of a valuable program.

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