

## ICED 2020 proceedings:

# Faculty Fellows: A promising program using the power of Dialogue Education

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### **Abstract**

Centers for Teaching and Learning play a key support role in the enhancement of the instructional skills of faculty, yet many Centers are not adequately staffed or funded. One solution has been to leverage the knowledge and enthusiasm of successful faculty members by embedding them within their colleges as “extension agents” of the Center to provide faculty support services. One of the dilemmas of this approach is the question of Faculty Fellows delivering consistently high-quality educational workshops to their peers. These proceedings provide a brief overview of a Dialogue Education model that worked to frame all workshop designs created and delivered by Faculty Fellows across campus, and which served, as an added benefit, to improve their own teaching as well.

### **1 Introduction**

Centers for Teaching and Learning play a key support role in the enhancement of the instructional skills of faculty. However, many Centers are not adequately staffed or funded. One way to alleviate these shortcomings has been to garner the knowledge and enthusiasm of successful faculty across campus (Cruz, 2019; List, 1997) and embed those faculty, as extensions of the Centers for Teaching and Learning within their colleges and departments (Sorcinelli & Austin, 2010). In this way the Centers have a stronger presence across campus, as faculty support is decentralized and more easily contextualized by discipline. At our institution, a Faculty Fellows program was developed to address the need to expand the reach of the newly established Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE).

A dilemma of embedded professional development is the question of Faculty Fellows’ ability to offer consistently high-quality educational development services to their peers (McKee & Tew, 2013; Smith, Greenwald, Nave, Mansure, & Howell, 2020). Faculty in higher education are disciplinary experts, but they seldom receive formal training in teaching or providing support services. Our Fellows assume a variety of professional developer roles, and it was an early focus of the CTE to provide quality training for every role and responsibility.

One of our Fellows’ key responsibilities is the creation and delivery of 30-minute workshops on a variety of topics that are offered across the campus. The concept of creating and delivering workshops is a shift for many faculty as a workshop, by definition, is a seminar or

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meeting that emphasizes the *exchange of ideas* and the *demonstration and application* of techniques, skills and so on. It is not the more familiar academic presentation where one person presents (i.e. “talks”) for thirty minutes. The focus is on participant activity rather than facilitator knowledge, and leverages the experience and insight of colleagues working together to improve their teaching and the expected subsequent student success.

To facilitate a collective understanding of the 30-minute workshop format, a training session was designed and delivered to the Faculty Fellows. The training session followed that same format, and faculty were able to “unpack” their experience as they made connections between the workshop in which they participated and the format they were learning to use.

## **2 The 30-minute workshop design**

The 30-minute workshop has theoretical underpinnings. First, its foundation rests on the adult learning principles of Malcom Knowles (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998), who crafted a theory differentiating teaching strategies for children from those more effective for adults. Among his principles we focused on two: that adult learners are problem-centered, and that they bring rich and varied experiences into the learning process. Content should be relevant and useful and build upon prior knowledge. On Knowles’ foundation of adult learning theory is also scaffolding from Vella’s (2002, 2008) Dialogue Education work. Again choosing principles and practices from this that are most salient for our purposes, we focused on three: learning requires safety; sequence; and meaningful engagement. Thus, our workshop design is mindful of an audience of colleagues; is sequential in terms of level of action; and utilizes active learning strategies. Throughout the framework runs dialogue between colleagues: in pairs, in small groups, and in the whole group during debriefing.

The approach we adapted from adult learning theory and dialogue education is useful on two levels. First, Fellows utilizing the framework experience a consistent, concise and outcomes-oriented format that accommodates varied learning strategies for engagement across disciplines. Second, the framework necessitates a design process that pushes faculty to focus on essential principles and practices, thus improving their own craft.

### **2.1 One objective, four steps**

In terms of workshop design, the 30-minute time limit makes it imperative to be focused. Regardless of the targeted learning domain – cognitive, psychomotor, or affective – creating an *achievement-based learning objective* ensures that indicators of learning will be observable during the session itself. While the format was expected to be consistent in all Faculty Fellow workshops delivered across campus, the content was open to the expertise of the Fellow and/or the needs of their particular college. In either case, a single achievement-based learning objective was crafted for each workshop.

Once the objective was clear, a component of Vella’s (2008) design framework was introduced. The framework has four steps: Anchor, Add, Apply and Away. Within the 30-minute limit frame faculty will begin with inductive work: anchoring new content in relation to their own context and experience; move to the addition of new content; follow with implementation tasks that invite them to immediately apply the new content; and finally propose integration tasks (the “Away”) where the learning transfer is considered.

A simple example would be the following achievement-based learning objective:

By the end of this workshop, participants will have chosen the healthiest ingredients for a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.

*Anchor:* With a partner, reflect on the version of peanut butter and jelly sandwiches that you ate as a child, and exchange stories.

**Add:** Working in a small group, review a chart of peanut butter brand ingredients and nutritional information. Continue with jelly brands and bread options. What are the important numbers and why do they matter? Based on your research, choose the healthiest option for each of the three sandwich components.

**Apply:** Compare your childhood (or current) choice of peanut butter, jelly, and bread to the healthy options you have identified. What adjustments can you make? Create a shopping list of new items to try out at home.

**Away:** Consider another favorite food and brainstorm with a partner how you might utilize the same process to assess nutritional value and make adjustments.

In addition to providing consistent workshop delivery across colleges, this framework establishes a routine of engagement. Faculty Fellows do not begin from scratch with every new topic, and colleagues who participate in the workshops know what to expect. The dialogue works to create community within the group and in every case a learning cycle is completed within the 30-minute time frame.

**LEARNING**

Workshop  
Framework Design

**[wurk' shop]** *noun*  
A seminar, discussion group, or the like, that emphasizes the *exchange of ideas* and the *demonstration and application* of techniques, skills, etc.

1. Anchor  
*tap into prior knowledge or experience*
2. Add  
*introduce new content*
3. Apply  
*immediately utilize content*
4. Away  
*plan for transfer and contextualization of learning*

Vello, Dialogue Education Learning Task Model

**DESIGNING FOR FACULTY DEVELOPMENT**

*Center for Teaching Excellence  
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“Through your workshops I have acquired several tools that I’m using in my classes. Many thanks for the book- it has provided me with lots of insight”  
*Dr. Uchenna Anele, Agricultural Sciences*



“Workshops offered by CTE provided me tremendous insights into creating stimulating learning experiences for students.”  
*Dr. Jacqueline Williams, Business & Economics*



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Figure 1: Designing for Faculty Development poster

## 2.2 Engaging with the workshop design

Instructors make many important instructional design decisions based on convenience, comfort, or current educational trends. The idea of a “design” for learning was intriguing, but Fellows also found it confining. First, the singular focus of one achievement-based learning objective was challenging – conceptually and in practice. That design component stands in contrast to the broad conceptualization and complexity that an expert in the field holds as tacit

knowledge, and which guides the academic presentation. The learning objective is for the *learners*, and the four design steps are crafted ahead of time to ensure that the theoretical underpinnings of the workshop format are honored (Hammons, 2017). Creativity is essential when choosing relevant, problem-centered, active and sequenced activities.

A template was generated to aid the process, and Fellows worked independently and in small groups to create their workshop design. They delivered the workshop and received feedback from their peers and the CTE staff, and then delivered the workshops across campus. The added value of a universally applicable framework is that Fellows could transfer the workshop design principles and practices to their own teaching routines, and in effect benefit themselves from the professional development they were delivering to colleagues.

### 3 Lessons learned

Our Faculty Fellows program has had its struggles. We learned through focus group data garnered at the end of the first year that many of the Fellows had hoped to focus on their own teaching initiatives, not the professional development of their colleagues. Despite the generous stipend (\$3000) per semester, they thought the program failed to afford them time and resources to pursue their own agendas. This might have been due to some initial miscommunication in the design and purpose of the program. With that said, all of Fellows indicated that they learned a great deal about teaching in general, and the field of faculty development. The workshops, for the most part, were successfully developed according to our model, but conflicts in schedules prevented many of the Fellows from actually delivering their workshops across campus. Several Fellows, seen as leaders across the campus, were called to other leadership positions and did not continue in the program. The program has been redesigned to accommodate current needs given the COVID pandemic. A new Digital Learning Faculty Fellows program has been initiated and the same model and expectations have been implemented, including a commitment from the Fellows to provide one-on-one support for faculty struggling with online teaching. The purpose of the program is clear and, so far, indicators seem to be that the program goals are being realized. We look forward to continuing to hone this program and to realizing the immense potential of a Faculty Fellows program.

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