



Instructional Skills Workshop: From Grassroots Initiative to International Perspectives

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Abstract

The Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW) is a direct-experience workshop that includes micro-teaching, video feedback, designing lessons with achievable learning objectives, and institutionally relevant topics. When conducting professional development activities, faculty developers model good teaching practices. Embedded in the ISW are many of those highly desirable pedagogical (andragogical) elements that developers wish to promote. The ISW is a very successful program that has survived and flourished in part because of the grassroots desire to promote better teaching and learning. The ISW is more than 25 years old, international in scope, with hundreds of facilitators, active at 100+ colleges, institutes and universities. Described herein are the basic elements of the peer-led, 24-hour workshop (3 or 4 days), including information about the amount of logistical effort required. Thousands of participants report that it promotes positive, reflective teaching practices, improves teaching, and increases self-confidence.

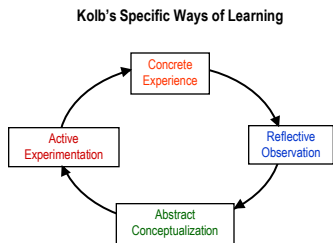
History

In the late 1970s as colleges and institutes expanded at a very rapid rate, educators in British Columbia (BC) recognized the need for some practical training for the many instructors being recruited to teach everything from welding to university-transfer biology. Douglas Kerr was contracted by Diane Morrison (BC Ministry of Advanced Education) to develop a short, practical, peer-led workshop that would provide participants with some instructional skills and a basic foundation in adult learning theory. The ISW quickly spread to many of the colleges, institutes, hospitals and other teaching and training organizations in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Newfoundland. The ISW has continued to spread, with active programs in California, Nebraska, Missouri, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut et al. and in other parts of the world including India, Chile, Brazil, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Hong Kong. In the early 1990s, universities in BC started to conduct the ISW and continue to offer the program, both as a stand-alone professional development activity and as part of certificate programs in teaching and learning for graduate students and faculty. Growth continues with new facilitators offering the ISW in both Canada and the USA, and more recent introductions to Ghana and Vietnam.

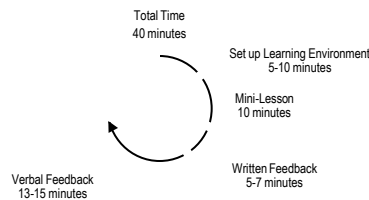
The Pedagogical (Andragogical) Rationale

Adult learners' needs are different. Certain assumptions about adult learners provide both a foundation for the ISW and the ideals promoted by the ISW. The basic elements of the ISW have changed little since its inception—a clear indication of its robust design. Many of the individual pedagogical elements have been examined over the years to determine if they provide the basic structure. While each of the elements has considerable empirical support, when combined they create a life-changing experience for many participants, whether they are new or experienced instructors. The overall structure of the program, the basic model, is flexible and resilient, an important characteristic of successful grassroots initiatives.

Given the focus of the ISW on experiential learning, both David Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning and the associated Learning Styles Inventory have become central features of the workshop and participants are encouraged to recognize different learning needs in their lesson design.



The Mini-Lesson Cycle



The list below outlines some of the elements common to most workshops:

- facilitators model the mini-lesson cycle while providing content (Learning Styles, Feedback, Cooperative Learning, etc.).
- participants and facilitators use a 6-part mini-lesson structure to design lessons.
- usually 5 or 6 participants in a group with 1 or 2 facilitators. In some cases, 2 or more workshop groups run concurrently and combine for some activities.
- usually conducted over 3 or 4 days (24 hours), in a variety of configurations, with some assigned reading and lesson planning required prior to Day One.
- facilitators assist learners with writing lesson plans, based on achievable learning objectives, across any of the learning domains.
- each participant 'instructor' teaches 3 mini-lessons—each lesson is 10 minutes long.
- participants are 'learners' in each others' lessons without role-playing.
- participant 'learners' provide written, oral, and other forms of feedback to the instructor.
- each lesson is video-taped and the video is a key element of the feedback.

Learning Domains



Some of the original workshop design requirements are key to the success of the model. The workshop was expected to:

- be of short duration, something that could be conducted in less than a week;
- be peer-led, with peers requiring a minimum of training to be able to facilitate the workshop;
- be based on and teach the principles of adult learning
- be fully experiential for all participants;
- provide basic course and lesson design models in support of adult learning principles;
- provide participants with the basic skills to give appropriate formative and summative feedback;
- provide a safe, confidential learning space for participants to take risks while learning.

The Elements

The resulting design was based on a simple, elegant structure. Facilitators create a safe learning environment. They organizing all the needed resources and provide the necessary structure. On the first day (or by providing 'suggested readings' before the workshop), facilitators provide some initial guidance on writing learning objectives, designing participatory lessons, and the giving and receiving of formative feedback.

After this very brief introduction, participants each conduct three 'mini-lessons' and receive written, oral, and video feedback from the other participants (usually one lesson / participant / day). Additional facilitator-led sessions on adult learning, learning domains and development, learning styles, diversity, cooperative learning, reflective practice, and other topics with direct practical implications for teaching are offered depending on the needs of the participants.

Mini-Lesson Basics (a suggested format for planning lessons)

| | Element | Description |
|---|---------------------------------|--|
| B | Bridge-In | Often called a 'hook,' this starts the lesson by attracting curiosity, generating motivation, and providing a rationale for learning the material. |
| O | Objective (learning) or Outcome | Explicitly outlines what product (knowledge, attitude, skill) will demonstrate learning—in what circumstances, to what level of performance. |
| P | Pre-Assessment | Determines what the learners currently know, to both guide the instructor's lesson, and remind learners of what is already known. |
| P | Participatory Lesson | Using active learning approaches to engage learners with the new material/content to achieve the learning objectives or outcomes. |
| P | Post-Assessment | Determines what the learners' know after the lesson in relation to the objectives or outcomes—using either formative assessment or evaluation. |
| S | Summary/Closure | Provides both instructor and learner the chance to reflect on the learning, debrief any remaining issues, and achieve closure on the learning. |

The handout contains additional information about the ISW. Briefly outlined are: 1) a sample 3-day agenda, 2) a list of some of the resources required (ISW Manual, video equipment, feedback forms, etc.) 3) a brief outline of the Facilitator Development Workshop (FDW) used to train ISW facilitators, and, 4) participant comments.