



What Makes a Good Workshop

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WHAT MAKES A GOOD WORKSHOP

Walter A. Anderson

I BACKGROUND OF THE WORKSHOP MOVEMENT

The "workshop movement" in teacher education dates back to 1936 when some 35 teachers of science and mathematics worked together for six weeks at Ohio State University. They all were teachers from the 30 secondary schools then cooperating in the "Eight Year Study" of the relation of secondary schools and colleges. This first workshop resulted in such marked changes in ideas and practices of the participants that a second workshop of 126 teachers from a wider range of subject field was held during the summer of 1937 at Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville.

It is interesting to note that many of you here present have attended the Higher Education Workshop conducted by New York University at Sarah Lawrence College each June. Professor Alonzo Myers, the coordinator, tells me that approximately 500 representatives of colleges and universities have participated in these Workshops during the past four summers and that the 1951 Workshop in Higher Education is now being planned.

Since 1936 educational workshops have spread widely throughout the United States and to some foreign lands. In fact the term is often misused for almost any kind of course or conference because the label seems to have drawing power. Almost all teacher training institutions have experimented with some kind of workshop and in several the movement has been highly developed. For example New York University during the past few years has offered a variety of workshops both on and off campus.

Workshop in Higher Education

Workshop in Educational Leadership

Workshop on United Nations and International Understanding

- Workshop in Secondary Curriculum and Guidance
- Workshop in Human Relations Studies
- Workshop in Elementary Education
- Workshop in Childhood Education
- Workshop in School Administration
- Workshop in Adult Education Leadership
- Workshops in curriculum, elementary and secondary education conducted in public school systems
- Workshops in international relations and foreign cultures carried out in other countries.

The Workshop as one means of in-service education is no longer in its infancy. It is a tried and tested procedure which has been the subject of experimentation and research in many colleges, universities, and public school systems. Also it has been tried out and evaluated in great national studies such as:

“Eight Year Study” by the Commission on the Relation of School and College of the Progressive Education Association.

Cooperative Study in General Education

Cooperative Study of Teacher Education

Intergroup Education in Cooperating Schools

American Council on Education

Michigan Community Health Project

Kellogg Foundation

Southern Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools Studies

Michigan Study of the Secondary School Curriculum

Public school systems use the workshop extensively in their in-service programs. Among them are Denver, Des Moines, Philadelphia, Minneapolis, Springfield, Missouri, and Battle Creek, Michigan and many others.

Also several national professional organizations have encouraged workshops through experimentation, sponsorship and research. Among them are:

Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development of the National Education Association
Association for Childhood Education
Progressive Education Association
American Council on Education.

One point should be clear. Those of us who have participated in Workshops for several years do not consider them panaceas for all aspects of professional education. There is a place for the lecture course, the discussion course, the problems course, the laboratory course, the seminar. There is also a place for the Workshop. It provides a unique opportunity to demonstrate to students and especially to those in service how they may live effectively with their students. Also the Workshop provides a unique opportunity to learn to use democratic group processes in attacking practical problems.

Let's take a look at the essential characteristics of the workshop and the features that make a good workshop.

II ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF EDUCATIONAL WORKSHOP

In 1940 the University of Chicago Press published a small volume entitled *Professional Education for Experienced Teachers*—The Program of the Summer Workshops. This book by Kenneth L. Heaton, William G. Camp and Paul G. Diederich was based on the results of five years of experimentation with workshops. The essential characteristics of educational workshops listed in 1940 are equally pertinent today.

"1. The participant is given an opportunity to make an intensive study of an interest which has arisen out of his experience as a teacher.

"2. The participant shares in planning a program of individual and group activity designed to meet his needs and those of his fellow workshopers.

"3. The participant is provided with easy access to the services of various staff members representing a variety of kinds of assistance.

"4. Formal and informal association with other participants of varied backgrounds contributes to the participant's thinking on his specific problems, broadens his general professional orientation, and provides opportunity for experiences in co-operative activities.

"5. An effort is made to interest the participant in the whole child, the whole school and the whole community.

"6. The participant's total experience as he studies a specific interest or problem tends to prepare him for the solution of other professional problems in the future.

"7. Since workshops have been concerned not only with the professional problems of the teacher but with his life as an individual, efforts have been made to afford opportunities for balanced living."

III WHAT MAKES A GOOD WORKSHOP

In preparing for this talk your speaker decided to ask a number of his associates here at New York University who are experienced in workshops to list the most important features that make a good workshop. Their ideas plus those which come from my ten years as a staff member in workshops are presented. The ten major features listed below together with the several sub-points under each should be helpful in planning, operating, and evaluating workshops in school systems and colleges.

1. *The purposes and scope of the workshop should be carefully defined as the bases for:*

Selecting staff members and consultants

Admission of participants

Determination of problems and topics for consideration in general sessions and smaller study groups

Selecting the workshop center
 Providing learning aids and materials
 Canvassing community resources which may be useful
 Publicizing the workshop
 Making arrangements for housing, meals, recreation and financing.

Providing for flexible, informal working conditions

As one of my associates put it, "The purposes of a workshop should be in keeping with the expressed needs of the participants rather than on what someone says they should have."

2. *A competent and versatile staff should be selected, made up of people:*

Who know the problems, interests, needs and achievements of those who will attend. At least they should be willing to learn.

Who are good listeners

Who are happy in serving a consulting, advising, resource person role rather than a directing, lecturing, telling others role

Who are team workers

Who are skilled in human relations and democratic group processes

Who represent a variety of abilities, talents, subject fields, and backgrounds of experience

Who are friendly, responsive, sympathetic, warm personalities.

Who are willing to try out new ideas and learn themselves

Who have full time for the workshop

As one person put it—people who do not know all the answers, are not "stuffed shirts" or "prima donnas".

3. *Careful pre-planning should be done in advance with those who will participate.*

Cooperative advance planning by at least some staff

members and students to establish purposes and scope, determine admission policies, select the workshop center and set it up, arrange for materials and equipment, prepare publicity and orientation materials.

Canvass of professional problems, interests, needs of those who will attend. If possible the selection of teams or committees from schools or colleges that will work together before, during and after the workshop. Also this kind of advance preparation will help in determining the make-up of study groups, workshop committees.

Canvass of special talents, interests, hobbies and professional experiences of those who will attend. This will help in planning recreational and social affairs, and also reveal professional resources in the workshop group.

Developing and distributing publicity and orientation materials such as bulletins, workshop handbooks, descriptive accounts of other workshops to build readiness for participation.

Selection of learning aids, library materials and equipment that will be needed.

Admission of those who have an interest to pursue, a job to do, a problem to solve, a plan to develop which is appropriate for the workshop being planned.

Adequate secretarial service should be arranged for in advance.

4. *Establishing of an appropriate and attractive workshop center* which includes:

Comfortable and even beautiful surroundings, if possible away from distracting influences.

Dining and if possible housing arrangements in the workshop center.

Rooms and laboratories for small groups, general sessions, library, audio-visual materials, arts and crafts, music and dramatics, recreation, and offices.

Movable furniture for various kinds of informal group work.

A quiet place to study, think and write.

Adequate equipment and supplies.

Community resources needed in workshop activities within easy reach, such as laboratory schools, community agencies, institutions, the out-of-doors.

5. *Cooperative planning and operation should be continuous throughout the workshop.* Some procedures are as follows:

Weekly meetings of a representative elected planning committee that includes staff and workshopppers from all groups, workshop committees and the like:

To establish workshop policies

To make needed arrangements and decisions

To plan the weekly schedule

To consider suggestions and criticisms

Set up workshop service committees needed in the workshop.

Service committees which have served workshops well are:

Publications

Evaluation

Audio-visual materials

Educational trips

Library

Bulletin boards and exhibits

General sessions

Luncheon arrangements and programs

Recreation and social

Clarification and planning early in the workshop by the individual regarding the problems or interests on which he will work.

Continuous cooperative planning in study groups and committees.

Planning for follow-up after the workshop

6. *Opportunities for continuous advisement, counseling, and guidance should be easily available.* Some suggestions are:

Each staff member should have responsibility as major advisor for 10 to 20 workshopppers. He is responsible for knowing these people well, their progress, their plans, their problems, their achievements in the workshop. If the major advisor is also the leader or consultant in a study group made up of these people, the advisement problem is more easily solved.

All staff members should be available to any workshop member who needs and wishes their help.

Time should be set aside by each staff member for individual and small group conferences. Most workshop evaluations place the individual conference and the informal study group highest on the list of helpful features of workshops.

Much helpful consultation and advisement take place informally — at the luncheon table, in the lounge, on trips, at social affairs, in the arts and crafts rooms.

The major advisor and other staff members who have followed the progress of the workshopper closely are in best position to recommend credit if that is involved.

7. *Good workshops have flexible schedules.*

The planning committee sets the schedule for a week or so in advance. This schedule is in reality a cataloguing of opportunities rather than a mandatory schedule.

The individual plans his own day and his week in terms of the opportunities and resources available to him. Usually his schedule would include:

Participation in study group sessions concerned with his interests and problems

Time for conferences with staff members and fellow workshopppers

Time for library study and planning related to his interests or problems

Attendance at general sessions and meals

Perhaps time for observations, trips, social events and recreation

Time to work in a laboratory such as arts and crafts, audio-visual materials, and to attend informal group meetings or "bull sessions."

In workshops the schedule should make it easy for groups to get together, resources to be used as needed, plans to be changed.

8. *Significant learning is an outcome of good workshops*

Workshoppers give intensive consideration to practical problems that are of concern to them and their schools systems or institutions.

People use resources such as published materials, staff members, learning aids, the study group, the community for their purposes.

They experience democratic group processes and thereby learn them.

They read widely, discuss freely, plan effectively, learn wholesome attitudes and useful skills.

They develop instructional materials, prepare recommendations and plans.

They participate in real projects of service to the community near the workshops.

They prepare and mimeograph or print summaries of the activities, achievements and evaluations of workshops.

They do something about what they have learned when they get back home.

As one person put it "a good workshop tends to resolve in action when the participants get back to their jobs."

9. *Evaluation is a continuous process in good workshops*

Each workshopper continuously evaluates his progress in terms of the purpose for which he came or the goals he sets for himself in the workshop. In this evaluation he probably will have the help of staff members and fellow-workshoppers.

The over-all workshop program is evaluated weekly by the planning committee and the next week's schedule is planned accordingly.

Study groups continuously evaluate and plan in the light of the needs of group members.

Evaluation committees make checks during and at the end of the workshop, using interviews, questionnaires and other instruments. Their findings usually improve the workshop program.

The formal examination for everyone is not appropriate or necessary in a good workshop since workshopers are pursuing different purposes. Furthermore the staff has much evidence of achievement and growth or the lack of it from extensive observation and association.

The workshop faculty is continually evaluating its services and role as well as the progress of workshopers. Marks and credits, if they are in the picture, are based on the pooled judgment of those who know the student well. Final marks usually are a minor concern of those who attend a good workshop. The real and abiding outcomes of an educational program can be judged only by what happens in the lives of the professional worker and those whom he serves. Evidence from follow-up studies is convincing that the workshop is one desirable means of professional education for people in service.

10. *The master key to a good workshop is good human relations*

The highest level of human relations is reached when people deliberately set out to *learn from each other* and to *help each other* in a wholesome, friendly, permissive, informal environment. The good workshop reaches these high levels of human relations through:

Bringing together people with common purposes, interests, problems, and real needs.

Providing a competent and versatile staff

Careful pre-planning with those who will participate

Establishing an appropriate and attractive workshop center

Cooperative planning throughout the workshop period

Opportunities for continuous advisement and guidance

Flexible workshop schedules

Significant learning opportunities

Continuous evaluation by all concerned.

I am grateful to my associates here at New York University and to the thousands of former workshopers who have helped me prepare this talk. We hope that the ideas expressed will be helpful in your discussions today and as you initiate and further develop workshops in your schools and colleges.

Dr. Walter A. Anderson is chairman of the Department of Administration and Supervision at New York University, School of Education.

REPORT OF PANEL DISCUSSION OF THE SIXTH ANNUAL HIGHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE, DEC. 2, 1950

REPORTED BY FRED KNAUTH AND JUSTIN MAHONEY

PROFESSOR GILES

Additional problems, not included in Professor Anderson's paper, might include the following:

1. Second-week insecurity.

Workshoppers finding the program different from in-service training may be fearful because the program is unfamiliar.

2. Grading.

When some person has to put down a grade for a human being attending a workshop, it has a bad effect on human relationships.