WORKSHOPS
WORKSHOPS
WORKSHOPS

Workshops must grapple with the hard realities of influencing human behavior. What makes them work? What are the ingredients of an effective workshop? Which innovations are worth developing? What is the formula for real success? Here are the stories of three workshops that served as the catalysts for change.

WORKSHOPS

The Committee on Teacher Behavior[1] (CTB) is an agency of the Physical Education Division Commission on Improvement of Instruction. The CTB explicitly has been charged with conducting activities designed to influence the teaching operations of physical educators in public schools and colleges. Members of the CTB have been engaged in the work of identifying alternative styles of teaching behavior and in the development of methods for communicating these alternatives to physical educators. The end result sought through the work of the CTB is the introduction of new teaching behaviors as well as the stimulation of concern and systematic thought about the problems and possibilities of the teaching act.

After preliminary work had been completed, the CTB met at Rutgers University in the spring of 1969 to plan a pilot teacher behavior workshop. One surprising fact immediately became apparent. The members of the CTB shared a number of serious doubts concerning the ef-
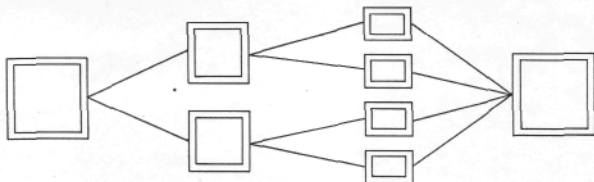
THE WORKSHOP THAT WORKED

fectiveness of the short-term workshop as a model for influencing teacher behavior. Three general problems were uppermost in their minds: (1) although some ideas catch on like wild fire in physical education, teacher behavior itself remains remarkably resistant to change on any large scale; (2) although teachers can be interested, excited, and even convinced in the course of a two day workshop, inevitably they must return to a work environment that contains all of the forces that shaped their preworkshop behavior—with consequent loss of motivation to implement new teaching styles; and (3) although the workshop has been a favorite vehicle by which professional associations attempt to influence their members, there unfortunately has been little effort devoted to measuring the actual impact of workshops on participant behavior. As a result, there is little information on which to base decisions about the proper design of effective workshops.

As a consequence of such concerns, the CTB undertook to postulate the problems that seemed most likely to limit the effectiveness of short-term workshops and to design a "logically appropriate" response to each problem. Five problems were identified (operating limitations necessarily excluded some problems that were not within the control of the committee) and appropriate responses were used in the design of the pilot workshop.

[1] Virginia Crafts, Joan Tillotson, Lawrence Locke, Rudolf Mueller, Jack Stovall, and Muska Mosston (chairman)

LAWRENCE F. LOCKE

Lawrence F. Locke is associate professor of education, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque.

Lecture Group   Demonstration Groups   Discussion Groups   Talk-Back Group

The CTB Pilot Workshop was held at Temple University in November 1969. Seventy-eight confirmed registrants were present—all but a handful staying for the full two and one-half days. Approximately half of the participants were men; 62% were professional teacher educators.

Feedback was solicited from participants throughout the workshop. In the closing session, half of the registered participants completed an open-end questionnaire concerning their feeling about the experience.

Subsequent to the workshop, tentative conclusions formed by the CTB staff were combined with participant feedback gathered at the closing session to form the basis for an extensive follow-up questionnaire to be distributed by mail. The mail questionnaire inquired into:

1. Behaviors actually changed as a consequence of attending the workshop. This information was obtained through the use of modified critical incident techniques.[2]

2. Suggestions for improving the workshop. This information was obtained through a combination of specific rating questions and open-end questions.

3. Demographic information concerning the participant's professional responsibility.

On January 1, 1970, 69 questionnaires were mailed to the participants in the pilot workshop. Through the use of mailing and follow-up techniques developed by Snelling[3] a response of 83% was obtained by the cut-off date of February 1. A second follow-up was carried out in late May.

Detailed information obtained from an analysis of the follow-up is now in the hands of the CTB. Several items from this report may be of particular interest to readers of JOHPER who are concerned with the design of short-term workshops.

The most interesting and encouraging fact is that, to the degree that self-report reflects actual events, the workshop had a substantial and diversified influence on the professional lives of those who attended; 63% of the participants described actual instances of subsequent change in teaching behavior—in the gymnasium and in the classroom. Also, 75% of the participants reported other behaviors related to teaching, such as reading books on teacher behavior, use of workshop ideas in supervision, planning special courses for undergraduate majors, and conducting their own workshops on teacher behavior.

A second outcome of the follow-up analysis is the conclusion that each of the CTB's responses to the postulated problem areas can be reviewed in the light of several kinds of relevant evaluative information. It already is apparent that some responses succeeded beyond our most optimistic expectation, while other responses simply fell flat.

Most of the responses to Problem I (The Credibility Gap) appeared to be effective, although it was clear that teachers want even more demonstrations than the design provided. The learning-cycle pattern, as a response to Problem II (Suppression of Talk-Back), was a resounding success, but the plan to segregate some groups by professional role had little impact other than to irritate people (most particularly the student group). The plan to confront Problem III (Diffuse Objectives) by creating a single focus for the workshop received near unanimous approval from active teachers and near unanimous disapproval by state, district, and departmental administrators.

The two-part response to Problem IV (Inefficiency) produced clear-cut results. The high intensity schedule for workshop activity taxed everyone's physical and psychological capacity—but not beyond an acceptable point. Everyone recovered and few seemed to regret the hard work involved. The focus on teacher educators apparently paid off handsomely in terms of diffusion of workshop materials into teacher training programs. The CTB did, however, considerably underestimate the possibilities for diffusion through public school teachers.

Members of the CTB feel that an even better workshop can be designed. The CTB has found AAHPER inclined to support and encourage breaks with tradition —even when the ideas obviously are controversial. With this in mind it is certain that future workshops will take yet other forms. Workshops for the real world must not focus on vague old goals such as stimulation, refresher experiences, the swapping of handy ideas, the sharing of problems, or even "professional dialogue." Instead, workshops should grapple with the hard realities of attempting to influence human behavior. Within certain limits, the CTB is convinced that short-term workshops can be made to work.

[2] John C. Flanagan, "The Critical Incident Technique in the Study of Individuals," Modern Educational Problems, 1952, pp. 61-70.

[3] W. Rodman Snelling, "The Impact of a Personalized Mail Questionnaire," Journal of Educational Research (November, 1969), pp. 126-29.

PROBLEM I (The Credibility Gap)

Short-term workshops suffer from a severe and pervasive gap between the idealized behaviors presented and what teachers believe to be practical and possible in their real world. The most common comment heard at a workshop is: "Sure, an expert can get up and talk about what we should do (or even demonstrate it), but he could never do it—(with my students), (at my level), (in my school situation), (in a real gym), etc."

RESPONSE I

1. Provide emphasis on live demonstrations rather than talk.
2. Use intact classes in real physical education environments.
3. Include a variety of age and grade levels in demonstrations.
4. Avoid selection of particularly well-skilled or well-behaved classes.
5. Avoid any extensive preparation of students for demonstrations.

PROBLEM II (Suppression of Talk-Back)

Short-term workshops frequently create a set of conditions within which the participants acquire an increasing backlog of *unexpressed objections, unasked questions,* and *unshared comments.* The consequence of this withholding process is a growing feeling of alienation from the workshop process, personal frustration, and the inclination to reject the suggested behaviors. The causes for this situation lie in: (1) the use of large groups within which genuine discussion is unwieldy or impossible, (2) little attention to provision for critical feedback from participants, and (3) patterns of organization which force individuals of widely differing status to interact on sensitive matters—without adequate preparation or protection for behaviors that may be perceived as threatening.

RESPONSE II

1. Divide the workshop into groups that are designed to be appropriate for the function involved. A single learning cycle within the workshop will consist of: (1) a large group lecture to present a major element of teacher behavior, (2) several medium sized groups to demonstrate the behavior, (3) many small groups for frank discussion immediately after the demonstration (each group with a workshop leader), and (4) a large group session in which the leaders and demonstrators are confronted with questions and comments from the small discussion groups. Each workshop day would contain a number of such learning cycles.
2. Separate public school teachers, teacher educators, administrators, and students into homogeneous groups for all small discussion sections. Teacher educators will be separated for some demonstrations.
3. Do *not* allow workshop leaders who have just given a presentation demonstration to be present in the following small group discussions.
4. Do not allow the total workshop enrollment to exceed a size that would place more than 20 participants in each small discussion group.

PROBLEM III (Diffuse Objectives)

Workshops often are diffuse or ambiguous in the messages they project to participants. This problem seems to arise from the desire to provide a "rich" experience (one containing a variety of contents and points of view) and from an egalitarian commitment to the notion that one man's approach to teaching is potentially as good as that of any other man.

RESPONSE III

1. Select one way of looking at and thinking about alternative teaching styles. Use that basic model to organize the entire workshop experience.
2. Recruit a group of leaders all of whom understand the selected well enough to work with it in direct contact with children and other teachers—whether or not it is an approach to teaching that they regularly use or particularly espouse.
3. Put all of the mechanisms of the workshop and all of the intellectual resources of the leaders at the service of one set of easily identified propositions and present the ideas one at a time, in an orderly sequence.

PROBLEM IV (Inefficiency)

Short-term workshops too often are inefficient in their use of time and expert resources and in the selection of target populations for attendance.

RESPONSE IV

1. Professionals from all levels may be invited but teacher educators *must actively be recruited.* Teacher educators are the appropriate target population in designing the workshop because of the potential for expanded pay-off.
2. The workshop must make full use of the time available (2½ days in this case). Work days will average 12 hours. Groups will be formed, dissolved, and moved with minimum loss of time.
3. Within the pattern described in II above, all leadership personnel must be engaged in face to face contact with participants during the largest possible portion of the work day.

PROBLEM V (Feedback and Evaluation)

Workshop procedures cannot intelligently be designed or revised because workshop planning only rarely includes attention to evaluation of process and results.

RESPONSE V

1. Provide vehicles for evaluative feedback from participants during the course of the workshop.
2. Undertake formal follow-up evaluation by mail after the workshop, both on short term and long term bases.
3. Focus follow-up questions on: (1) obtaining unambiguous evidence concerning the presence or absence of changes in teaching behavior as a direct consequence of the workshop, and (2) soliciting opinions and advice from participants concerning the revision of workshop organization and procedures.