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POD: The Founding of a National Network

JOAN NORTH and STEPHEN C. SCHOLL

In the 1970's we have witnessed an explosion in the number of committees, offices, positions within colleges, regional and national projects devoted to the renewal of institutions through "faculty development," especially the improvement of instruction. The spectre of "no growth" for higher education had accelerated a common concern for the quality of teaching and learning. By 1974 foundations such as Danforth, Kellogg and Lilly and agencies such as HEW—especially its new Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education—were seeding a variety of new teaching improvement programs. Many faculty and administrators were quickly launched into activities for which they typically had not been prepared.

A more complete history of professional development efforts in higher education would include the immediate forebearers of the movement of the 1970's. Institutions such as Purdue had been using student evaluations of courses since the late 1940's. Many large universities had established offices to provide technological support for instruction, and by the 1960's it was common to find former audiovisual aide centers engaged in the promotion of instructional design concepts as the basis for technical assistance ranging from individualized self-paced learning to multi-media presentations. Curriculum development projects, devices like liberal arts workshops and personal renewal retreats for faculty, typified by the activities supported by the Danforth Foundation, were regularly available. Other private foundations such as Ford and Andrew Mellon made institutional grants to encourage new efforts to enhance learning. Yet the period 1973–76 was a watershed that produced a flow of projects that caught up a more diverse, larger group of people from

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all sorts of institutions. The new stream was studied by Jerry Gaff during its formative period. In 1975 he found 218 faculty development programs or centers. Many of those who headed committees, ran projects and staffed centers were engaged in related helping roles. It is too much to claim that a new profession was emerging. But it was gradually becoming clear that people who had previously seen themselves as teachers, researchers, administrators and technicians were adapting each other's skills—and creating some new ones. They needed information and training. And many working alone on their campuses felt a need for support from colleagues in these new endeavors. They began to seek association with each other.

Although by 1973 interest in faculty development was already widespread (for instance, the first issue of the then new source book series, *New Directions for Higher Education*, was Marvin Freedman's collection entitled "Facilitating Faculty Development," [Jossey-Bass, Inc., San Francisco, 1973]), there were few generalists well-known for their work in institutional renewal, faculty development and instructional improvement. The annual conference of the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) that Spring featured such sessions as instructional development as practiced at Syracuse University, large-scale media productions as developed at SUNY-Albany, and small-scale feedback experiments supported by the Kellogg Foundation. That year one consortium—the College Center of the Finger Lakes in New York—offered a faculty workshop that experimented with training techniques drawn largely from the organizational behavior field. Syracuse ran its first summer seminar at Sagamore in the Adirondacks, giving representatives from several other institutions exposure to systematic consultation on instructional development. A few regional groups began to get together to share expertise and, as was the case in Ohio, to organize conferences to promote institutional attention to the quality of instruction.

By 1974, however, a flood of proposals were generated for faculty development projects, many of which were funded by institutions, foundations and agencies. *Faculty Development in A Time of Retrenchment* was published early in the year by *Change* magazine and the first printing quickly sold out. A dozen or so recognized experts

in the field, now in great demand, found themselves on the programs of national meetings—such as the March AAHE Convention in Chicago and a conference on faculty evaluation held in April at Kansas State University—and even at an international conference sponsored by the Clinic to Improve University Teaching at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in October. In November, Dykman Vermilye, executive director of AAHE, called together a small group of practitioners from consortia, regional projects and professional associations to consult with AAHE's officers on how the Association might help individuals and institutions navigate this torrent of activity.

In the following year and a half AAHE searched for a role in serving the growing number of people who needed information, training and sound advice on how to establish, maintain and evaluate new efforts at professional development. Though the Association never found a way to directly incorporate the national coordination of such services into its own operation, it did facilitate bringing together people who had interests in such activity. Again in March, 1975, the AAHE National Conference featured sessions on professional development and teaching improvement. During that conference, a special meeting was called, attended by approximately 150 conferees, to discuss a proposed national organization focused on faculty development. The group calling the meeting, headed by Al Smith of the University of Florida, had just brought out the first edition of the *Faculty Development and Evaluation Newspaper*. Throughout the academic year, 1974–75, AAHE sponsored a number of regional workshops, some of them based on the Kansas State University Conference held the previous year. Most important, though, AAHE secured funding from the Lilly Endowment and the Johnson Foundation to host a meeting at Wingspread, Racine, Wisconsin, April 29 to May 1, 1975, on applied behavioral science in higher education. A delphi questionnaire was circulated to invitees asking them, among other things, what the future held for professional and organizational development in higher education, whether guidelines or assistance could be provided for the organization of conferences, projects and research in applying behavioral science to the problems of higher education, and whether or not some kind of national network would be helpful. While the conference did not produce a specific proposal for organizing national efforts, a small

group discussed such possibilities and two of the participants, William Bergquist, a consultant with the Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges (CASC), and Bert Biles, then head of KSU's new Center for Faculty Evaluation and Development, resolved to take some action.

CASC held a workshop on faculty development at the College of Mount St. Joseph, near Cincinnati, in January, 1976. Bergquist and Biles capitalized on this opportunity to invite a small group of people active in faculty development to join a T-group for the purpose of exploring central problems involved in their professional development work. The group met immediately prior to the CASC Conference. Several members of that group met each other for the first time in Cincinnati and later became members of the first core committee of POD. During the CASC Conference a plenary session was held to assess interest in organizing what was then being called PODHE (Jack Lindquist's brainchild, pronounced phonetically)—Professional and Organizational Development in Higher Education. About 20 people indicated their interest by paying dues (!) and an initial mailing list was developed.

While POD regularly refers to that Cincinnati event as its first "national conference," the structuring of POD did not begin until the following March in Chicago at the annual convention of AAHE. An informal meeting was arranged by Bergquist and Biles to generate ideas about organizing the new group and to gather further support. The name (and acronym) of the new organization was decided upon: Professional and Organizational Development Network in Higher Education—to be known familiarly as POD (pronounced "pod" or "p-o-d"). Volunteers at the meeting agreed to make up the first "core committee." In subsequent meetings during the conference the committee selected Joan North, then of the University of Alabama, as the first coordinator, roughed out an organizing strategy and planned to offer a national conference in the Fall. Shortly after the March meetings memberships were solicited, and North solicited a few more people to join the Core Committee to represent missing areas.

From 1976 to 1978, POD's major service was the organization of an annual national conference and several regional workshops. The first such conference offered under the POD banner was held in October, 1976, at Airlie House in Virginia, just outside Washing-

ton, D.C. The conference program featured faculty development. In spite of late advertisement, applications to attend quickly outstripped the capacity of the Airlie facilities. Approximately 240 people came from all over the United States and Canada. Preceding the conference, the Core Committee met, clarified its structure and procedures for the following year and established overlapping three-year terms for committee members. The principle of volunteerism was continued by insisting that all candidates for the Core Committee nominate themselves for an election by the entire membership.

Most of those who attended the Airlie House Conference found what they wanted: information about a variety of professional and organizational development issues, particularly improving teaching, a sense of personal support from others working in the same area and a chance to meet people with more or different expertise. Nonetheless, as might be expected in any new association, other expectations varied. Those who had organized POD were committed to the philosophy and style of a “network”—an organization which values affiliation, support and friendship as key goals in addition to the exchange of information. Many of those who attended the Airlie House Conference were not particularly interested in joining a network, but had high needs for information. Group exercises aimed at introducing people to each other and efforts at inclusion were viewed variously, sometimes with suspicion. A few people resented the closeness of the organizers. There was an ill-defined “in group” running things, somehow larger than the Core Committee but identified in part with those who had belonged to the T-group that had met in January in Cincinnati. Finally, an attempt to explicitly give people an opportunity to offer their consulting skills to each other appeared to some conferees to smack of an entrepreneurship seemingly foreign to academe.

This early confusion about purposes and ownership of POD was reflected in the vagaries of membership growth. After the Airlie conference there was 412 members in the new network, though it was apparent that many had joined only because it was part of the “package” that came with registration for the conference. By the close of 1977–78 membership was 308, with only approximately half of the members renewals. Yet almost the same approximately two score people worked on the Core Committee, led regional workshops, were featured in conference sessions or did all three.

The October, 1977, national conference was held at Illinois Beach State Lodge in Zion, Illinois. The site was chosen in part because of its central location, relative isolation, low cost and the fact that it held almost exactly 200 people, then judged to be ideal for a POD conference. The program included "networking" strategies, both get-acquainted and information-exchange exercises, and, again, a means to link potential consultants with consultees. While some new attendees especially enjoyed this consultation linkage, the evaluation of the conference again showed that it tended to emphasize the negative impressions of an entrepreneurial closed group. It was the last time POD provided such a service. On balance, however, conferees enjoyed being interviewed about the conference and gave most of the program high marks.

The Zion Conference also reflected some new aims of POD. Some sessions featured attempts to define research in professional and organizational development, but many of the most popular offerings were "demonstration workshops"—participatory experiences in which one learned both how to offer a particular kind of workshop and experienced part of the workshop.

During 1977 the Core Committee underwent the sometimes painful transition from a group of self-selected volunteers who were well acquainted with one another to a gradually emerging representative body. When the committee held its annual working session during the AAHE Conference in March, some of the veterans complained that programming was aimed too exclusively at newcomers. A further difficulty arose in satisfactorily incorporating new members into the fellowship of the committee. It was resolved that thereafter national conferences would offer programming aimed at both novices in professional development and other sessions that would be useful to experienced members. It was further resolved that subsequent mid-year Core Committee meetings would begin with well-designed exercises aimed at integrating the new third of the committee with the old hands.

During 1976–78 three series of regional training workshops were offered as services to the members. In December, 1976, three concurrent workshops were offered in organizational development, life planning, and instructional consultation in the Cincinnati area. Early the next year a workshop on evaluation and another on instructional consultation were held in Kansas City, and during the

following academic year three more workshops were successfully completed. Also, a workshop on interpersonal relationships, a kind of ad hoc support group for people working in faculty development, had been held at Airlie House immediately after the 1976 conference. It soon became apparent, however, that although members frequently indicated an interest in the offering of regional workshops, it was extremely difficult to generate sufficient enrollment to make very many of them economically feasible (and they always drew more nonmembers than POD members).

Early in 1977 the organization was incorporated in the District of Columbia. Coordination of POD shifted from Joan North to Mary Lynn Crow (University of Texas, Arlington) in the Fall of 1977, with the position now titled Executive Director. Under Crow the Core Committee assigned a task force to develop a mission statement and, during 1978, to conduct a delphi study of goals for the organization (see the article in Summer 1979 on the POD Delphi). The committee also formed a committee on membership and professional relations, in part to examine the potential connections between POD and other higher education associations and external bodies that might have effects on professional development in academe. Quickly nicknamed the "global impact" committee, this group has become an increasingly important part of the organization since that time.

By 1978 POD had achieved a certain stability as an association. It was widely identified as the primary national organization for people working in faculty and administrative development. The national conference in November, 1978, at Afton, Oklahoma, though the same size as the previous year's conference, was evaluated by participants as the most successful yet and now quite clearly meeting the expectations of virtually everyone attending. Most observers reported that the earlier concern about entrepreneurship and a closed group had been almost entirely dissipated as the time approached for the third round of elections for the Core Committee (the first full rotation of its membership). At the conference plans were made to launch this *POD Quarterly* and give more attention to personal and career support of members, the needs of academic administrators and research. The Executive Directorship was transferred to Glenn Erickson of the University of Rhode Island in November of 1978 and a new approach to regional organization was

planned. Under the leadership of Glenn Nyre, a policy of continuing program evaluation was reaffirmed. The 1978 Delphi study underscored a solid sense that these are the activities members want.

Each POD activity still turns up a sizeable number of people who have been involved in professional development or related activities in higher education for two years or less. But someone new to the field and the veterans now have an organized network to which they can turn for information, training and, probably most important, support.