Section IV: Heads Open, Hands On!

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One of the hallmarks of the annual POD Conference is that all "presenters" are required to design active sessions, to involve participants, to attempt to model effective practice in teaching and learning. One of the assumptions in putting together a collection of resources for people engaged in faculty and organizational development work in higher education is that we include pieces that describe learning activities, that can be used as aids in stimulating teachers and collegiate staff to rethink their goals and build new skills. Hence this section of "hands on" materials.

Most people in the field sooner or later turn to some excellent compilations of training exercises, such as the widely-used annual publications of University Associates, or the more specialized handbooks for faculty development assembled by Bill Bergquist and Steve Phillips over the last eight years. Perhaps the time will soon arrive when we should gather more of those ready-to-tailor scripts and handouts. For the present, we have included only one such article, and that as an illustration. What follows is instead a sampler of the kinds of development materials POD people regularly produce, with some mild encouragement to GET IT DOWN ON PAPER SO THE REST OF US CAN USE IT! We hope that the next resource collection will include a much larger number of such practical reports, guidesheets and handouts.

Davis and Young have captured some wisdom from the grass roots of the Dakotas in their short summary of things to remember when planning a workshop. Workshops are the central group learning device
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for educating and training professionals (and other adults), yet many fail to bring about lasting change because basic design and logistical elements are overlooked. In a few pages gleaned from the ideas of many laborers, Davis and Young give us a handy recipe for improved offering.

The description of one way to use David Kolb’s “Learning Style Inventory” by Buckwald and Scholl is included as an example of the kind of detailed yet brief exercise directions that can substitute for actual demonstration of training approaches. In this case the learning styles activity has been used effectively both in faculty development workshops and in regular college classrooms. Florini’s self-help invitation to computer literacy, on the other hand illustrates a way in which we might prepare short handouts for faculty, staff and students so they can pursue a new skill independently. It is an example of how we may extend the tradition pioneered so well by Stanford Ericksen and has colleagues at the University of Michigan with their quarterly six-page Memo to the Faculty.

Finally, we have selected an extensive description of one of the more ambitious and successful faculty development workshops which has evolved since the movement entered its contemporary phase in the mid-1970’s. Nowik accepted our challenge to write up in detail rationale for a week-long seminar on course development and teaching improvement that has grown out of the annual summer workshop for faculty in the Great Lakes College Association. While her description may not be sufficient to guide a novice through such an undertaking (several experienced leaders and significant skillful adaptation are essential to the success of this and similar workshops), it does provide old hands with insight into what happens and why it’s done that way.

“Developers” tend so much to be experimenters and doers, that it is hard to get them to sit back and reflect on their practices, examine theoretical assumptions and articulate these observations for colleagues. It is likely, though, that if more of us balanced our efforts with writing about the “exercise that always works” (and how we adapt it every time) and about the assumptions underlying our best learning designs we produce a major stride forward in improving higher education. Here are four small steps for learning.

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