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Cosmopolitan Communities for Faculty Developers

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The authors of this article describe the evolution of two programs in New Jersey that address the isolation of individual instructional/faculty developers by providing reference groups where leaders of instructional/faculty development programs can go to sustain themselves, associate with other experts and exchange ideas. The two programs, supported by the New Jersey Institute for Collegiate Teaching and Learning, are the regional coordinators' meetings for Partners in Learning and the Faculty Development Network.

Faculty development officers could be called the "Woody Allens" of the academic world—isolated, disempowered figures, serving outside of the chain of command. Like college teachers, they perform their function essentially alone, and like college teachers, they need support, not just financial, but the same kind of support they offer faculty. As Gouldner (1957) points out, persons outside an organizational power structure have a stronger need to belong to outer reference groups, to have places they can go to talk about their specialized roles and exchange ideas with persons in comparable positions. When they do participate in outside reference groups, they become "cosmopolitans" as opposed to "locals."

However, because faculty development is a relatively new field, an outer reference group did not exist before the formation of POD, and because of budget constraints, many faculty developers are unable to attend the annual POD or other professional conferences. Of those who do attend POD conferences, many cannot sustain themselves without a built-in reference group, a place to go, away from their own campuses—to associate with other experts, to exchange ideas, to become truly cosmopolitan.

Two programs in New Jersey have succeeded in addressing these issues of isolation by providing support for leaders of faculty development programs: the regional coordinators' meetings for Partners in Learning (formerly the New Jersey Master Faculty Program) and the Faculty Development Network.

Partners in Learning Coordinators' Meetings

The coordinators' meetings began as problem-solving sessions for faculty coordinators who were initiating the Partners in Learning Program on their campuses. The coordinators, appointed by their own campus administrators, met with the state-wide director to discuss the challenges of initiating the Partners in Learning Program on a variety of campuses in the state.

Partners in Learning Program

Partners in Learning involves pairs of faculty working together for a semester or even a year to observe one another's classes and interview students. In addition, the on-campus participants meet together several times a semester to discuss their experiences (For more details on the Program, see Smith & LaCelle-Peterson, 1991; Golin, 1990; and Katz & Henry, 1988).

To sustain a program on a campus, one or two coordinators, assist in forming faculty pairs, call campus meetings, represent the program to administration, and finally, and most importantly for this article, attend regional meetings called by the director of the state-wide Program.

History and Development of the Coordinators' Meetings

Joseph Katz, the founder of the New Jersey Master Faculty Program, organized four-hour coordinator meetings. As noted above, these meetings began as problem-solving sessions associated with beginning programs on campuses. Katz, however, hoped they would become educational "think tanks." Because of Katz's premature death, only the original group of coordinators met with him, and they did not fully participate in realizing his vision of the meetings.

Katz encouraged those original coordinators, including Myrna Smith and Steve Golin (co-authors of this article), to be model participants, as well as campus coordinators. Because the group members had new experiences to report and because the monthly meetings were so long, coordinators began telling stories about the student interviews and classroom observations. Influenced by Katz's openness to experience and skills of analysis, the group examined the situations from all angles. These stories became the primary mode of "discovering" principles of teaching and learning. In that way the meetings encouraged thinking—albeit, perhaps, not at "think tank" level.

Steve Golin, the second program director, formed two more groups of coordinators. The three groups met separately, but each evolved in the direction of becoming a kind of support group. In addition to reflecting on the experiences of interviewing and observing, the coordinators began to comment on the experience of being with each other. Coordinators found the state-wide meetings more nourishing than the campus meetings of participants, which they conducted.

Gathering off campus, away from their own campus power structures, with people who were not part of their particular campus culture, they experienced a sense of freedom and trust. Discussions became more personal. Coordinators volunteered genuine dilemmas they were encountering with students and colleagues and asked for feedback and help. Feeling more accepted, they began to listen better to one another. The line between the personal and the professional became blurred.

One of the surprises in Rice and Cheldelin's (1990) external program evaluation was how much the coordinators valued their meetings as ongoing opportunities for renewal. The evaluators also pointed out, however, that faculty do not necessarily have to learn everything "through practice and reflection" (p. 16). A body of knowledge about student learning already exists and faculty should be encouraged to learn from it. They wrote:

> As evaluators, we are confident that the program could be significantly enriched by the introduction of the intellectually challenging work of William Perry and David Kolb early on. Valuable faculty time is wasted in proceeding as if this substantial knowledge base does not exist. (p. 17)

From that point on, Golin began introducing outside readings, although the emphasis on the meetings was still the experience of the coordinators.

By the fourth year of the Program,[1] support given to coordinators in the form of released time from teaching was withdrawn by some campuses. To make meetings more manageable, Myrna Smith, the third program director, introduced several changes: she reconfigured the coordinator groups according to geography, with meeting time reduced from four to three hours. New campuses joined the project in all regions of the state, making all three meetings a mixture of experienced and new coordinators.

Of the coordinators who retained their positions, some had been serving since the very beginning, others for two years. Many of those coordinators were no longer participants, and because they were not participants, they no longer had raw stories from student interviews or from classroom observations. Even some of the new coordinators saw themselves as administrators of, rather than participants in, the program. In short, the nature of the meetings had to change.

The emphasis of the meetings shifted from the primary experience of the group to the body of knowledge on teaching and learning. Readings included *The Harvard Assessment Seminars* (Light, 1990); selections from Perry (1970); Kolb (1984); and Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986). In addition, columns from *The Teaching Professor,* etc., were discussed. Experts on such subjects as critical thinking and learning styles addressed the groups. Coordinators themselves made presentations on such topics as using groups and designing student assignments to develop critical thinking skills and to promote intellectual growth. As one coordinator noted, "The meetings were like taking a graduate class in teaching and learning."

One of the outcomes of making the meetings more theoretical and less experiential was that coordinators had ideas to take back to their campuses for the Partners in Learning meetings or for their entire faculty. Another outcome was that the groups became less personal: group members no longer hurried to meetings to share stories about their students or their children.

Katz and Henry (1988, p. 7) point out "that learning is an intensely emotional experience," so as the groups became more traditionally academic, they also may have become less supportive of change in the participants. However, coordinators, some of whom receive no measurable reward from

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[1] The New Jersey Master Faculty Program was contracted to the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation by the New Jersey Department of Higher Education from 1987 to 1990. The Program was moved to the New Jersey Institute for Collegiate Teaching and Learning (NJICTL) on July 1, 1990. NJICTL, which also supports the Faculty Development Network, was established in 1989 by the New Jersey Department of Higher Education at Seton Hall University for the purpose of supporting teaching and learning at all New Jersey colleges and universities, two and four year, both public and private.

their campuses (some do receive released time from teaching), come to the meetings, usually prepared to discuss the announced topic. Their regular attendance indicates that these meetings offer something that they do not get on their own campuses: meeting with faculty, not only from different campuses, but from different types of campuses, and discussing possible solutions to the challenges of improving teaching.

Faculty Development Network

The Faculty Development Network (FDN) is a collegiate group comprised of: 1) faculty development leaders who hold formal positions in their institutions; 2) faculty interested in specific faculty development projects, such as international and writing-across-the curriculum projects; and 3) faculty involved in innovation. FDN holds one annual meeting. Two-and four-year colleges, both public and private, as well as research universities participate.

History and Evolution of FDN

In l986 New Jersey's Department of Higher Education issued a report, *Supporting and Strengthening the College Faculty* (Marcus, 1986), calling for a state-wide focus on faculty development. The report indicated that the pervasive feelings among college faculty were of "lost mobility, diminished enthusiasm, eroded compensation, conflicted demands and constraining conditions"; therefore, the state would initiate a "comprehensive, multifaceted program . . . designed to support college faculty in their quest for excellence" (p. 1).

The program outlined as a response to this condition was expensive and comprehensive; however, it did spur some campus faculty development leaders to suggest a simpler program, one that provided opportunities to get acquainted, to exchange ideas informally, and to learn from one another's expertise. The idea gained interest, and The Faculty Development Network was born.

However, FDN almost did not survive the first state-wide meeting, which featured formal presentations by nationally-known speakers. The interactive, "networking" part of the program consisted of a questionnaire distributed during the last fifteen minutes of the program. There was no enthusiasm for another meeting.

In 1989, The State Department of Higher Education established the New Jersey Institute for Collegiate Teaching and Learning to centralize and coordinate faculty development efforts in higher education in New Jersey.

Working with campus faculty development leaders was a logical part of the Institute's mission. Co-author of this article, Enid Friedman, was asked to develop an alternative proposal for state-wide networking. A committee of campus faculty development coordinators, chaired by Friedman, consulted with POD members across the country and then designed a one-day annual conference.

The purpose was to initiate an annual state-wide meeting—low-key in image and low-cost to survive budget reversals—featuring informal activities for campus faculty development leaders. To ensure representation from a variety of institutions, local leaders would plan and participate in the program. Networking would occur naturally, as leaders began to know and trust one another.

The Annual Meeting

The formal "network" structure is simple, low-cost, and easy to orchestrate: only one annual meeting. The format consists of fifteen to twenty Campus Action Project (CAP) presentations in the morning. The twenty-minute concurrent sessions give faculty development leaders an opportunity to showcase successful faculty development activities from their campuses. A formal sit-down luncheon and alternative interactive workshops in the afternoon facilitate communication and the exchange of ideas.

The program has sometimes included a luncheon speaker; however, that presentation detracts from the important business of the day—communication among the faculty development leaders. The attendance over three years has grown from sixty to one hundred, with more campuses becoming involved. But the real evolution is ongoing: a growing connectedness among faculty development leaders throughout the state.

Networking

Because the faculty developers know each other, some contact each other during the course of the year. The ideas heard at the annual meeting appear on other campuses. For example, the College of St. Elizabeth began a series of lunch-time dialogues on cultural diversity modeled after those held at Jersey City State College and William Paterson College.

Essex County College established a Faculty Recognition Committee to send letters of thanks and token gifts to deserving faculty as a result of a CAP presentation by Brookdale Community College. Essex also produced its first handbook for part-time faculty, modeled after Burlington County College's. Georgian Court introduced the one-minute paper after the concept was

presented in an interactive session led by the faculty development leader from Monmouth college.

Friedman also adapted the FDN meeting format for the first college-wide Faculty Day at Essex County College (this format has become a state-wide meeting model), using the CAP scheduling for morning presentations about classroom innovations, followed by an informal lunch and afternoon alternative workshops. She expected no more than sixty-five attendees, but one-hundred-and-twenty faculty, administrators, and adjuncts attended and participated with enthusiasm. The cost: the price of a few dozen pizzas.

Conclusion

The success of both the Partners in Learning coordinators' meetings and the Faculty Development Network, judged by attendance and survival, indicates that they satisfy the need for more cosmopolitan communities. In their evaluation of the (now) Partners in Learning, Rice and Cheldelin (1989) note that the program brings this dimension to teaching: "The advantage that involvement in research brings to faculty is that it keeps them in contact with a group of peers beyond their own campus—a cosmopolitan community" (p. 23). The interviews with campus coordinators conducted by Rice and Cheldelin revealed the appreciation they had for "having a place to talk about teaching with faculty from campuses across the state" (p. 23). The faculty development leader, often running a one-person operation, also needs the cosmopolitan dimension that the Faculty Development Network provides.

The success of both the Partners in Learning coordinators' meetings and the Faculty Development Network also indicates that there are relatively simple and inexpensive ways to provide outside reference groups for faculty developers. What faculty developers respond to is the chance to exchange ideas and experiences with colleagues from other institutions. In learning from each other, faculty developers develop themselves. What POD does nationally, we all can do locally.

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