



BEST PRACTICES FOR EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Illustrated with the *Earth to Sky*
Professional Development Workshop

Your commitment to these principles will help you create training opportunities that promote change or growth, reach clear outcomes, and help people develop new relationships.

1. Establish and share clear outcomes

- State goals and objectives of workshop up front
- Give everyone an agenda that provides a sense of structure and rhythm for the experience
- Provide opportunities for participants to know where they are within the process—recap activities, overview of next steps

2. Design activities to engage all participants

- Teach/use collaboration tools (like Norms of Collaboration)
- Importance of shared interest—allow opportunities to highlight shared values, and to share their motivation for being in the training
- Provide a catalyst for participants to get to know one another (otherwise it may not happen on its own). This also encourages free exchanges of ideas during the training process.
- Create a balance between structured and unstructured time
- Provide an opportunity for a little fun—silliness with a purpose (awards, icebreakers, etc)
- Provide ample opportunities for informal, unstructured interactions between participants and between participants and speakers
- Provide for varied learning styles (lecture, facilitated interaction, group work, one on one conversations, “share-a-thon,” dedicated individual work time, were all used in *Earth to Sky*)

3. Model effective learning processes and environments: Make sure participants are learning by being engaged in the process (model good interpretive technique if you are teaching interpretation)

- Try to build some consistency in structure of each day (research supports this concept)
- Allow choice (do not always assign group memberships, allow learners to choose topics of greatest interest if at all possible)
- Give breaks!
- Move from the most familiar to the least familiar throughout course of workshop

- Have groups build some cohesiveness and achieve some success (perhaps with somewhat familiar content) before attempting a big task or before learning and applying weighty content
- Pay attention to the physical space
 - Setting is important! (familiar locations or new, cramped room vs. spaciousness, urban or rural, lighting, layout of space...)
 - Orient people to physical space and let them know their physical needs will be met: breaks; lunch; where is the bathroom, pencil sharpener, socket for laptop, coffee, etc.

4. Establish clear roles

- Describe who is involved in the workshop/task (in *Earth to Sky*: education and outreach specialist, scientist, facilitator, evaluator, participants)
- Clarify the task (in *Earth to Sky* it was to learn and create a plan for an interpretation product using new knowledge)
- Remind participants of their responsibility for achieving the task as appropriate/needed

5. Have participants take responsibility for reaching the stated outcomes

- *Earth to Sky* facilitator/coaching structure (facilitators also were participants, and their coaching helped participants to stay focused and on task)
- Part of the requirement for acceptance to the course was a commitment to use materials and content presented during the workshop
- Set realistic and honest expectations (ex., do not surprise people at the end by suddenly collecting or reporting their work!)

6. Connect with participant's own work and thinking

- Provide a context for the content to be delivered (for *Earth to Sky*, it was science context and interpretation context—provide participants with a contextual understanding of where the content fits)
- Ask yourself, how will the content apply to participants' jobs?
- In *Earth to Sky* we taught the Interpretive Process Model *before* the science, so people could begin to relate how the science would fit into the process of creating interpretive products
- In *Earth to Sky* facilitated discussions for each science presentation provided opportunity for participants to make the connection between the content and their own work (creating interpretive products)

7. **Provide opportunities for continued learning and maintaining relationships after the event**
 - Through use of technology maintain contacts (follow up e-mails, calls, updates; web site creation)
 - Availability of leaders and scientists after event was emphasized in *Earth to Sky*
 - Make use of the mentors/coaching /“auditing” processes at home park or site
8. **Encourage participants to share what they have learned with others outside the event**
 - Participants asked to do so as part of initial screening process
 - Participants created and conducted training for peers at their parks/regions
 - Posting of action plans and follow-ups on workshop website
9. **Ensure adequate time for authentic work activity** (as close as possible to the participants’ “real world” task)
 - Stick with the 40/60 rule (40% content, 60% to reflect upon and use the content to accomplish the task--challenging to do!)
 - Dedicated, structured time to work together on identified task
 - Provide resource-rich environment (experts, in-print resources, electronic resources, example interpretive techniques, etc.)
10. **Provide ample time for reflecting on the information and experiences**
 - Include reflection time for participants throughout the workshop (use journals, and pauses to write/think in sessions)
 - End of day assessment/reflection time for participants (a chance to breathe! journal time)
11. **Meaningful Evaluation!** (providing reflection time increases likelihood of worthwhile responses during evaluation)
 - Use application process as tool for pre-assessment; use e-mail or online access to administer pre-assessment tool
 - Pre- post- assessment chart (akin to the handout in this session)
 - Use focus groups to provide feedback at points the workshop (formative evaluation, catch items one might not otherwise)
 - End of day debrief for workshop organizer team (this provided insights we would not have otherwise received)

Drawn from *Designing Professional Meetings and Conferences in Education: Planning, Implementation and Evaluation* by Susan Mundry, Edward Britton, Senta A. Raizen, and Susan Loucks-Horsley Corwin Press 2000

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