

**Climate, Classroom, and Critique: A Faculty
Development Workshop for Noncredit Instructors**

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Community College of Allegheny County, South Campus has a continuing education program that enrolls about 15,000 noncredit students each year in lifelong learning classes, business and industry contract training, and social service grants. Approximately 300 instructors are hired each semester to teach the lifelong learning component. These instructors are dedicated teachers, 52% of them having taught three years or longer. Sixty-five percent of them reported in a faculty demographic survey that they taught for "enjoyment of the subject matter or teaching." Student evaluations overwhelmingly reveal that they are inspiring and talented teachers. However, 33% do not have a bachelor's degree, and 59% do not have any degrees in education.

Because our program, like all lifelong learning programs, is so dependent for its continued success on the quality of instruction we offer, the continuing education division decided to offer an in-service program to our faculty. After some soul searching and reviewing of what we'd done in the past, it became clear that what we wanted to accomplish was part information-sharing about the college and part morale-building.

We explored the usual ideas--orientation, workshops about various aspects of teaching, and even a video on teaching adults--when it dawned on us that we weren't practicing what we preached. While we stress to our instructors that adults need diverse teaching activities--adults are self-motivated, adults like to participate--we had been planning a traditional lecture-style session. What we ended up with was an experiment.

Based on the assumption that our instructors wanted to talk rather than merely listen, we divided them into eight groups, based on the type of courses they taught; this made groups of about 38. We also guessed that about half of the faculty would not come, so we would end up with groups of 20--a reasonable size for discussion.

We also assumed that we would get a better turnout if we paid the instructors to attend. We could only afford \$25, so that is what we offered. Each instructor received an invitation asking them to "please plan to attend..." There was not an indication that the session was optional. Enthusiastic announcements were also made in the division's quarterly newsletter for noncredit

instructors. We called the event a faculty "meeting" rather than an "orientation" or "training," thinking that "meeting" implied more professionalism and respect. The eight meetings were scheduled, four groups per evening, on two weeknights in January before the semester began, at 7 p.m. We promised to finish by 9 p.m.

Once the logistics were decided we were still faced with deciding what to do with the instructors for two hours. With a lot of help from an intern from Indiana University of Pennsylvania's master's degree program in adult education we put together Climate, Classroom, and Critique. As participants arrived in the mezzanine reception area they received a handbook and some articles on teaching adults. They were invited to socialize over coffee and tea before going directly to their group break-out rooms; there was to be no large opening session. In the rooms, each leader had arranged the chairs for comfortable conversation--circles or rows facing each other. After some welcoming remarks, the leader got the group right to work, asking about climate--how do teachers set the physical, emotional, and intellectual climate for their classes? Classroom--how do teachers teach? How do they deal with various classroom situations? Critique--how do they judge when things are going well? What do they do when they're not?

Worried that there would be only perfunctory participation, we had prepared some back-up activities to extend the session to a reasonable 8:30 p.m. conclusion. We never needed them; in fact, each leader had to cut discussion off at 8:45. It seems that our teachers were starved for such an opportunity to spend time with teachers of similar subjects. They couldn't wait to share experiences and teaching tips. They didn't hesitate to ask each other advice about the troublesome incidents they'd had. They encouraged and reassured the first-time teachers in the room. They asked questions of the leader, clarifying administrative matters we'd wanted to explain anyway. They left the room feeling motivated and knowing they were part of a larger, more organized program than they could see each night as they taught their classes at the local high school.

Some of the teachers went straight home afterward, but most of them gathered for more coffee, tea, and cookies in the reception area. They asked questions of the division administrators, but, just as important, they talked to each other for another 45 minutes.

There is a postscript to all this. One of the questions on the evening's evaluation form asked what our division could be doing for them that we weren't. About fifteen ideas recurred on all the surveys--they were concrete ideas about registration,

certificates, supplies, and so on. We responded to each one in the next two issues of our newsletter. Some were clarifications of existing procedures, and some were changes we made to make things simpler or more helpful. But each recommendation was addressed, and everyone was thanked for bringing them to our attention.

The instructors' evaluations of the evening told us that it was the \$25 that brought them (believe it or not), but what they valued most was the opportunity to share, both with us and with each other. They expressed their surprise that the session was really of value to them. Of the 300 invited 196 came, more than the half we had expected, and most indicated that they would come back to the next one, which is precisely our next problem--how to top this. We're planning and gathering ideas already, but we are sure of one thing--that next year's will be small group participation activities as well.

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