Resistance to Planned Change: A Training Design Case Study

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Abstract: Giving in-service training to support an implementation plan which is not particularly popular can be fraught with difficulty. The major concern can probably be summed up in the following manner: what can one do to interest and motivate workshop participants who are feeling resistant to the proposed change? One response to this question is presented in the following case study.

INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEXT

This case study takes place in an organization in which one of the functions is the teaching of English as a second language to adult francophones in a number of affiliated schools. When an institutional plan was drawn up to implement major changes in the English as a second language program — changes in terms of scheduling, content, length of training and teacher control — a colleague and I were given four months to design a 'training package'. The training package, consisting of workshop and materials, was to prepare teachers to implement two of the new components of the student program. One component focussed on the use by the student of job-specific materials which would be worked on without direct teacher supervision, although the teacher would be responsible for the student's progress. The other component involved an interview with each student to be conducted by the teacher every six weeks, during which student progress was to be discussed and evaluated.

At the time of the proposed implementation, most of the teachers in the system had at least ten years teaching experience and some had as many as twenty. In addition, all the teachers had for a number of years been responsible for all program decisions relating to their own students' learning, that is, they decided what to teach, and how and when to teach it.

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As a result of these two factors, most teachers viewed themselves as competent professionals; further, they could see little pedagogical reason for the proposed changes given that students were passing the required tests and that the new program would reduce the teachers' ability to individualize. Thus, the proposed changes were viewed with considerable skepticism, indeed resistance, and this reaction tended to spill over to the proposed training. Our task of developing and providing training was one which my colleague and I would have preferred to avoid; however, this was not possible. The following is a description of what was done in an attempt to deal with the dilemma in which we found ourselves.

THE FIRST STEP: CONCEPTUALIZING THE PROBLEM

We began by assessing what we already knew that would help structure the problem in a useful way. Being familiar with the implementation and change literature, and Charters and Jones' (1973) summary of it as a 'non-event', we recognized the need to view the proposed training package in a somewhat novel way from that traditionally associated with the rational, institutional notion of change implied in the concept of 'implementation'. We chose to view the planned change as a learning process — as an on-going, largely intemalized process — occurring at the level of the individual even when instituted at the level of the organization.

In terms of a change model, this approach could be termed normative — re-educative (Chin & Benne, 1969). The important point is that change or learning is only a possible, not a certain, outcome of being faced with new information. Logic or reason alone will not control the outcome, and coercion will only have a temporary effect. Learners can have access to new information, but their responses to it are dependent on their previous knowledge and experience, and their desire and ability to change. They may ignore the information, or they may choose to use it in their own way.

Given that we had chosen to operate within this learning framework, the next step was to consider what we knew about the adult learning process. Aside from our personal experience with adult learners, our conception was influenced and refined through reference to the andragogy literature (e.g., Tough, 1971; Kidd, 1973; Knowles, 1973).

The adult learner is someone who, *when personally motivated,* is a very good learner, who can act independently and be self-directed. Since personal motivation is a prerequisite, the easiest kind of learning tends to occur when the outcome is highly relevant for immediate application. As personal dilemmas are often the starting point of such learning, the adult learners' experiences are their most important resource; they frequently learn through becoming aware of and evaluating their own experiences.

We also had some knowledge about the teacher as an adult learner. The following points seemed significant. First, reflection on and self-assessment of one's practice are important steps in undertaking change. Second, although change occurs at the level of the individual, collegial support is important in sustaining the attempt (Brundage & Mackeracher, 1980) as teachers view each other as important resources and sources of help (e.g., Fullan, 1981; Holdaway & 1980). Third, long-term institutional support in the form of on-going training and materials is important in sustaining the

change (e.g., Lighthall, 1973). Finally, the notion of 'deskilling' (Elliott & MacDonald, 1975) was helpful in reminding us that in many cases adults need to unlearn something before they can learn something new. Even when a change is desired by an individual, extensive practice may be required to develop the new skill because old habits must first be extinguished.

With this conceptual structure as a guide, we began to prepare the training package. The task was divided into two major components: developing materials and establishing an appropriate procedure and process (both in and out of the workshop) to facilitate the individual teacher's learning.

MATERIALS DEVELOPMENT

The four month developmental process was initiated by holding meetings to which all teachers were invited. The reasons for this are the following. First, we wanted teachers to have a sense of ownership, a stake, in the training process. Second, we needed to respond directly to teacher needs, not our perception of their needs, if teachers were to be interested in and motivated to undertake learning and change.

At these meetings, we described the planned changes which we were to prepare training for and asked teachers to pinpoint potential areas of difficulty. Since the plan had not been implemented, everyone's notion was hypothetical. We promised that within our ability we would use their concerns as the basis of our work and that issues beyond our control would be passed on to management. We audio-recorded these meetings so that it was possible to make transcripts and go over them later in order to list the ideas and suggestions offered. This list in the form of a memo was then sent out to all the teachers and further ideas were solicited. The summary of information gained from these meetings and the later memo provided the base from which all materials development proceeded.

A number of concerns emerged from this process, but there were two major ones relating to the proposed teacher/student interviews. Since these concerns are generalizable to other settings, they will serve as the basis for examples presented in this case study. One concern was a feeling of inadequacy about the teacher's ability to use interviewing skills effectively. A second related concern was the teacher's ability to conduct the interview in French, given that even in a first language some interviewing can be difficult.

With the objectives defined, the next step was to find 'input', information that might usefully be offered to the teachers during the workshop. This input was drawn from a variety of sources. For example, an ERIC search was conducted to uncover articles and research reports that dealt with the teachers' concerns, and film and video catalogues were reviewed to locate potentially useful materials. After collecting as much information as time and personal resources would allow, we began an instructional design process in which materials were developed, reviewed by experts, revised, used in very limited trials ($n = 2$), and revised again. These, then, became provisional versions for the first workshop.

The structure or organization of the developed materials is a response to our

understanding of how an adult, in this case a teacher, learns and undertakes change. At the beginning of each set of materials, there is an objective clearly stated so that users understand the task to be accomplished; there is also a description of the exercises to provide users with an overview of the process being undertaken. As well, it is often suggested that users work with another teacher or at least that they find someone to respond to their ideas or work, that is, to use a colleague as a resource.

At the end of each set of materials, users are asked to create 'something', for example, a video or an essay, in order to apply or try out any new information they have gained and see whether they can and want to consolidate it into their practice. Finally, self-evaluation is a feature as well; users are asked to assess specific aspects of their behaviour in the 'product' they have created. In terms of interviewing skills and the use of French, there are eight 'units', that is, individual packages of exercises and activities.

Each unit follows the same format. First, there is a title page with the major heading "Interviewing" and a unit title describing the aspect of interviewing dealt with in that unit (e.g., *Using Non-Verbal Cues to Facilitate Effective Communication).* Next, there is a performance objective page describing what the user can expect to be able to do at the end of the unit, what the unit consists of in the way of exercises and activities, and what additional resources the user will need in order to complete the unit. After this, there is a table of contents. Then, the actual exercises begin. The exercises are designed to provide input useful for accomplishing the performance objective. Doing an exercise could involve watching a video in order to fill in a grid, reading and summarizing some excerpts on a subject or perusing some student materials with particular criteria in mind.

What comes next is the core activity of each unit: an SDL, or self-directed learning, activity. The SDL activity is the realization of the performance objective. It is the opportunity for the user to accomplish the performance objective using personal knowledge and experience and whatever aspects of the input, the exercises, have proven personally relevant. The SDL activity is most often the creation of a product, for example, the writing of a brief essay or the recording of a role play on video or audio cassette.

After creating a product, the user evaluates it in some way. A self-evaluation checklist is often included (especially when the SDL activity is recorded). Of course, the user is free to modify the checklist to suit personal needs. Frequently, it is suggested that the user seek out a colleague to compare and discuss answers.

The final part of a unit contains any or all of the following resources: answer keys, tapescripts, supplementary exercises (usually these focus on the use of French in an interview).

As a result of the development and subsequent revisions (still not complete) of these materials, some features important in facilitating adult learning were incorporated into the units: a focus on perceived needs, the provision of advance organizers, a reliance on peer support and self-evaluation in the learning process. Our biggest concern then became finding a means of conducting the workshops that would enhance these features of the materials.

A PROCESS TO FACILITATE INDIVIDUAL TEACHER LEARNING

We felt the materials would provide a necessary and important contribution to the learning process. Nevertheless, the procedure and process of the workshop and any follow-up activities would be crucial elements in the learning process we were trying to facilitate.

We needed some conceptual framework to guide us in formulating both how we would conduct the workshop and conduct ourselves. We settled on the classroom meeting model (Joyce & Weil, 1972), as it is suggested for the teacher who wants to emphasize improvement of performance through the learner's self-assessment of behaviour.

The classroom meeting model is an approach in which the teacher presents a problem to the learners, after which the discussion becomes learner-initiated. The teacher attempts to make non-evaluative comments, but at the same time tries to encourage the learners to make personal judgments about their behaviour and to make commitments to alternate courses of action. The teacher's responsibility to support learner commitment to change continues after the class. Thus, this model responded to the teacher's need for collegial support, for reflection and self-evaluation in undertaking change and for long-term support in sustaining change. Our post-meeting follow-up support (being conducted now) is not, unfortunately, as extensive as it might have been because of time and travel constraints; we are dealing with teachers in different cities and we are also giving additional workshops and carrying out materials revision. Our efforts have been limited to: seeing, phoning or writing each teacher at least once every six weeks to discuss problems and concerns, pass on any new information, and to try to provide a sense of psychological support.

As for our application of the classroom meeting model to the actual workshop, this can best be understood by a description of how the workshop is conducted.

The four-day workshop begins with a series of activities (individual, pair and group) which clarify everyone's expectations of what can be accomplished. The intent of these activities is to highlight the potential value of the workshop for each participant's professional development. The workshop is only one small portion of the individual and continuous process of developing professional knowledge and expertise.

In the first activity, we emphasize that participants are responsible for setting their own goals and working at their own pace, alone,.in pairs or in groups. We downplay our role as trainers or leaders, stressing our primary responsibility as facilitating and debriefing. The next activity leads to individual needs assessment and goal setting, goal setting being important for focussing participants' learning. In the final activity, each participant receives an index of the available units cross-indexed to the needs assessment just completed. By referring to this index, the participants can make appropriate choices about which units will best serve their needs. Participants are encouraged to make modifications to the exercises in order for the exercises to better suit their needs and preferences, although it is suggested to participants that any major changes be discussed with us. The responsibility we undertake is that one of us will always be available for debriefing or facilitating.

Each day proceeds in roughly the same manner. First, based on our interpretation of the classroom meeting model, there is usually some group activity in which an issue is presented to the group for discussion. One day begins with an exercise in which participants are required to self-evaluate their success on different tasks done in French. This is followed by a group discussion of what criteria they used in the evaluation process, how their experience relates to student self-evaluation, and so on. After this activity, which provides the focus for the participants' thinking and work for the day, participants separate to work as they wish. Debriefing, another aspect of our application of the classroom meeting model, occurs either in a group later in the day, or we meet with participants individually as they finish various activities. On the last afternoon, there is a final group meeting in which participants can form plans for future learning activities.

The preceding has provided a brief glimpse of both the design of the workshop materials and our application of the classroom meeting model to the process of the workshop. What follows is a preliminary report (based on three workshops) of participants' reactions and our observations, as well as a brief discussion of the implications of the approach.

REACTIONS, OBSERVATIONS, IMPLICATIONS

My understanding of the participants' reactions is based on two sets of documents: the overall feedback on the four-day workshop, feedback which was anonymous and did not focus specifically on the approach and materials used; and the unit feedback forms in which participants rated the exercises and the SDL activity for each unit.

The unit feedback forms contained quite uniform trends. Although the rating of units varies (some being more popular than others), consistently the SDL activity in each unit is rated higher (on a ten-point scale) than the exercises for the same unit, a sign that the SDL activity was, as planned, more personally relevant than the exercises.

Of the eighteen feedback sheets received, six of them included unsolicited favourable comments on the approach and materials, for example, "very self-directed, not boring at all (hardly ever had to yawn)" or "a very good feeling — enjoyed reading excerpts . . . and applying them — that's a good way (for me) to learn things."

Nearly all participants reported that they would have liked the workshop to have been longer as no one was able to finish all the units. In fact, in one case, two teachers came back after a workshop and continued to work together on some units. This desire for a longer workshop highlighted three important aspects of the workshop: goal setting (recognizing areas for improvement and making a commitment to change), evaluation, and using peers as a resource.

Since all the units could not be completed, participants were forced to choose which ones would be most valuable to them. This was an important criterion of our learning model. At the same time, this solved one of our teaching concerns: we had not been sure there were sufficient materials to keep everyone happily occupied given varying needs and goals and varying learning speeds.

We observed that for some participants, even ones who were later enthusiastic, the

approach was initially confusing. Part of this response was, of course, a reaction to the contrast between this approach and the more traditional in-service training they had been receiving. For example, initially we found participants would often check the limitations on their behaviour. They would ask questions such as: Can I do it this way? May I use a dictionary? They did this until it became clear that they were free to modify exercises and SDL activities to better suit their needs. Of greater concern, perhaps, is that although for some the approach seemed ideal, for others there appeared to be too much freedom and self-direction. A few people asked for more structure. This was probably partly a matter of learning style. Our response was to provide more structure by working quite closely with the few who seemed to want it.

All the participants seemed comfortable with the personal and peer evaluation that was a part of the approach; only one pair asked us to watch one of their videotaped role-plays (with no specific request for feedback), and many participants did not seek us out for debriefing. In these cases, we had to seek them out since we saw debriefing as an important way of fulfilling the demands of the classroom meeting model. One individual summed it up well: "You can learn a lot from your peers — don't have to feel you're being evaluated by anyone."

Overall, there was a positive response to the approach. However, questions remain and arise as one considers the wider implications of this design.

How would the structure and organization of the materials need to be modified for other applications? We have just recently been notified that we are responsible for providing training to teachers in isolated settings. Budgetary constraints do not permit us to provide on-site training. However, these materials are designed to be used primarily by individuals and pairs. Are they, therefore, appropriate for self-access or long distance training? If so, what additional written, video or audio instructions would be necessary? Could conference calls play a role? These are questions that we must face shortly.

A longer range and perhaps more important issue is that this approach shifts the leader's role: she or he needs to respond much more on an individual basis. This shift in focus suggests other questions. For instance, what skills of leadership and counselling become important when working individually? What signs does a leader look for to know when a participant wants to or can benefit from intervention?

To conclude, I hope that the initial positive response to this approach will encourage others in different settings to try similar methods; perhaps, in this way, some of the above questions will be answered.

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