

Instructional Skills Workshop: From Grassroots Initiative to International Perspectives



<http://www.iswnetwork.ca>

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Abstract:

The Instructional Skills Workshop (ISW) is a direct-experience workshop that includes micro-teaching, video feedback, designing lessons with achievable learning objectives, and institutionally relevant topics. When conducting professional development activities, faculty developers model good teaching practices. Embedded in the ISW are many of those highly desirable pedagogical (andragogical) elements that developers wish to promote. The ISW is a very successful program that has survived and flourished in part because of the grassroots desire to promote better teaching and learning. The ISW is more than 25 years old, international in scope, with hundreds of facilitators, active at 100+ colleges, institutes and universities. Described herein are the basic elements of the peer-led, 24-hour workshop (3 or 4 days), including information about the amount of logistical effort required. Thousands of participants report that it promotes positive, reflective teaching practices, improves teaching, and increases self-confidence.

History:

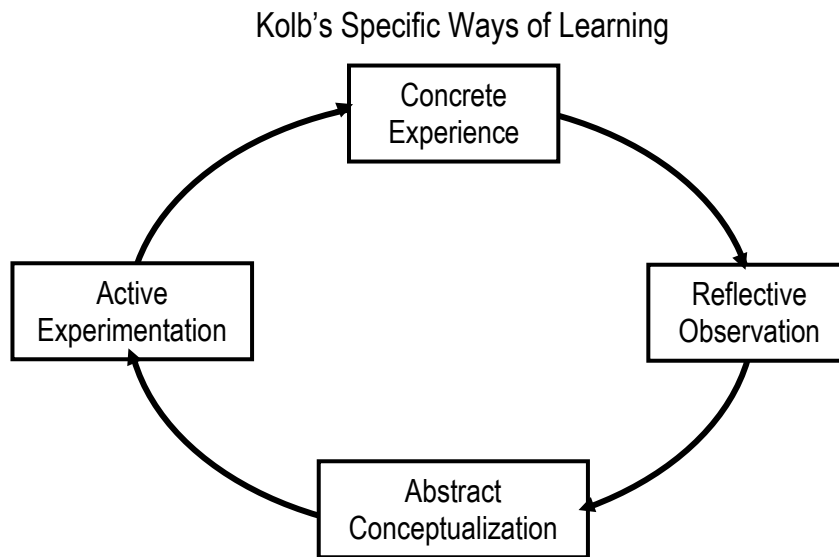
In the late 1970s as colleges and institutes expanded at a very rapid rate, educators in British Columbia (BC) recognized the need for some practical training for the many instructors being recruited to teach everything from welding to university-transfer biology. Douglas Kerr was contracted by Diane Morrison (BC Ministry of Advanced Education) to develop a short, practical, peer-led workshop that would provide participants with some instructional skills and a basic foundation in adult learning theory. The ISW quickly spread to many of the colleges, institutes, hospitals and other teaching and training organizations in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Newfoundland. The ISW has continued to spread, with active programs in California, Nebraska, Missouri, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Connecticut et al. and in other parts of the world including India, Chile, Brazil, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Hong Kong. In the early 1990s, universities in BC started to conduct the ISW and continue to offer the program, both as a stand-alone professional development activity and as part of certificate programs in teaching and learning for graduate students and faculty. Growth continues with new facilitators offering the ISW in both Canada and the USA, and more recent introductions to Ghana and Vietnam.

The Pedagogical (Andragogical) Rationale:

Adult learners' needs are different. Certain assumptions about adult learners provide both a foundation for the ISW and the ideals promoted by the ISW. The basic elements of the ISW have changed little since its inception—a clear indication of its robust design. Many of the individual pedagogical elements have been examined over the years to determine if they provide the basic structure. While each of the elements has considerable empirical support, when combined they create a life-changing experience for many participants, whether they are new or experienced instructors. The overall structure of the program, the basic model, is flexible and resilient, an important characteristic of successful grassroots initiatives.

Given the focus of the ISW on experiential learning, David Kolb's Specific Ways of Learning and the associated Learning Styles Inventory have become central features of the workshop (see Figure # 1) and participants are encouraged to recognize different learning needs in their lesson design.

Figure # 1: Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning



Some of the original workshop design requirements are key to the success of the workshop model. The workshop was expected to:

- be of short duration, something that could be conducted in less than a week;
- be peer-led, with peers requiring a minimum of training to be able to facilitate the workshop;
- be based on and teach the principles of adult learning;
- be fully experiential for all participants;
- provide basic course and lesson design models in support of adult learning principles;
- provide participants with the basic skills to give appropriate formative and summative feedback;
- provide a safe, confidential learning space for participants to take risks while learning.

The Elements:

The resulting design was based on a simple, elegant structure. Facilitators create a safe learning environment. They organize all the needed resources and provide the necessary structure. On the first day (or by providing 'suggested readings' before the workshop), facilitators provide some initial guidance on writing learning objectives, designing participatory lessons, and the giving and receiving of formative feedback.

After this very brief introduction, participants each conduct three 'mini-lessons' (based on micro-teaching models) and receive written, oral, and video feedback from the other participants (usually one lesson/participant/day). Additional facilitator-led sessions on adult learning, learning domains and development, learning styles, diversity, cooperative learning, reflective practice, and other topics with direct practical implications for teaching are offered depending on the needs of the participants.

The list below outlines some of the elements common to most workshops:

- Facilitators model the mini-lesson cycle (see Figure # 2) while providing content (Learning Styles, Feedback, Cooperative Learning, etc.).
- Participants and facilitators use a 6-part mini-lesson structure to design lessons (see Table # 1).
- Usually 5 or 6 participants in a group with 1 or 2 facilitators. In some cases, 2 or more workshop groups run concurrently and combine for some activities.
- Usually conducted over 3 or 4 days (24 hours), in a variety of configurations (Table # 2 outlines a typical 3-day plan, with some assigned reading and lesson planning required prior to Day One.)
- Facilitators assist learners with writing lesson plans, based on achievable learning objectives, across any of the learning domains (see Figure # 3).
- Each participant ‘instructor’ teaches 3 mini-lessons—each lesson is 10 minutes long.
- Participants are ‘learners’ in each others’ lessons without role-playing.
- Participant ‘learners’ provide written, oral, and other forms of feedback to the instructor.
- Each lesson is video-taped and the video is a key element of the feedback.

Figure #2: Mini-Lesson Cycle

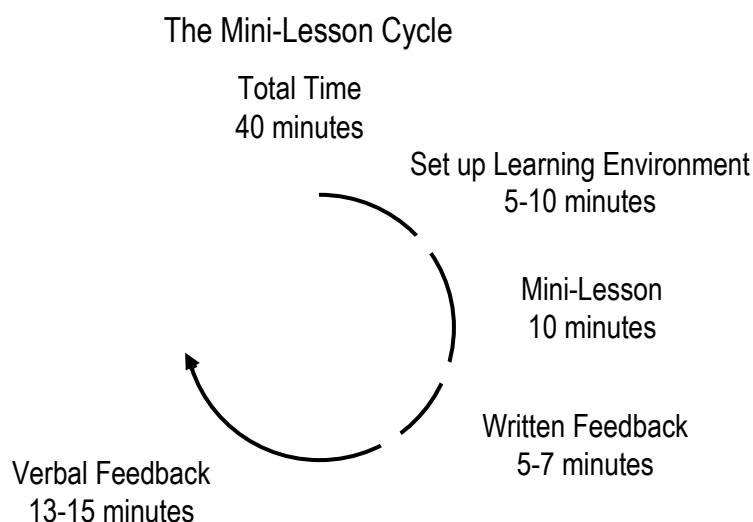
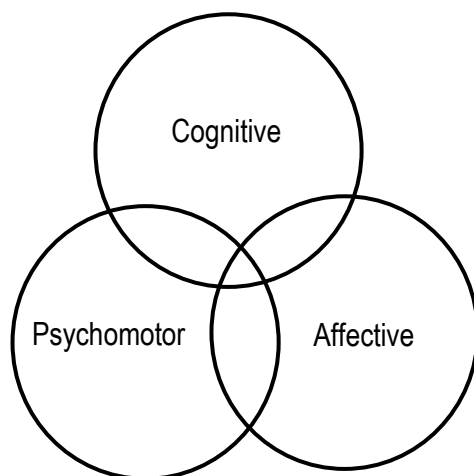


Figure # 3: The Learning Domains*



*Participants often find Benjamin Bloom’s Taxonomy of Educational Objectives useful when writing Objectives or Outcomes across the Learning Domains.

Table #1: Mini-Lesson Basics

Mini-Lesson Basics (a suggested format for planning lessons)		
	<i>Element</i>	<i>Description</i>
B	Bridge-In	Often called a ‘hook,’ this starts the lesson by attracting curiosity, generating motivation, and providing a rationale for learning the material.
O	Objective (learning) or Outcome	Explicitly outlines what product (knowledge, attitude, skill) will demonstrate learning—in what circumstances, to what level of performance.
P	Pre-Assessment	Determines what the learners currently know, to both guide the instructor’s lesson, and remind learners of what is already known.
P	Participatory Lesson	Using active learning approaches to engage learners with the new material/content to achieve the learning objectives or outcomes.
P	Post-Assessment	Determines what the learners’ know after the lesson in relation to the objectives or outcomes—using either formative assessment or evaluation.
S	Summary/Closure	Provides both instructor and learner the chance to reflect on the learning, debrief any remaining issues, and achieve closure on the learning.

Table # 2: Typical 3-day Agenda

Time	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
8:30-10:30	Welcome. Icebreaker / Agreements. History, Format & Theme of the workshop. Model Mini-Lesson. Feedback Basics.	Welcome. Debrief Day One formative feedback. Learning Styles & Collaborative Learning Mini-Workshops.	Welcome. Debrief Day Two formative feedback. Participant or Facilitator Identified Issues.
Break			
10:45-4:30	Setting Goals: Workshop and Daily Review: Lesson Basics & Writing Objectives <i>Lunch and Breaks</i> Mini-Lesson Cycles	Setting Daily Goals. Review completed lesson plans. <i>Lunch and Breaks</i> Mini-Lesson Cycles Emerging Issues.	Setting Daily Goals. Review completed lesson plans. <i>Lunch and Breaks</i> Mini-Lesson Cycles Emerging Issues.
4:30-5:00	Review Daily Goals. Provide formative feedback to workshop facilitator(s).	Review Daily Goals. Provide formative feedback to workshop facilitator(s).	Review Daily & Workshop Goals. Summative feedback. Graduation/Certificates

Conducting the Workshop: *Resources Needed*

In addition to standard classroom equipment, each group of 5-6 participants will need a video camera (individual tapes for each participant), a TV to show the videotapes, a copy of the ISW Manual for each participant and multiple copies of the feedback forms (samples included in the ISW Manual). To better model different teaching and learning approaches, it is nice to have flip charts, an overhead projector, other projection options (slides, projection camera, LCD, computer) and assorted office supplies (coloured pens, index cards, post-it notes, tape, etc.). Participatory learning is risky and the workshop experience is quite intense for many participants. If possible, the room used should be private and secure for the full 3-4 days of the workshop.

Conducting the Workshop: Training Needed

Facilitators of the ISW have completed a five-day Facilitator Development Workshop (FDW)—usually after completing an ISW as a participant. The FDW only trains participants to facilitate the ISW, with a focus on the mini-lesson cycles (BOPPPS, managing feedback, lesson planning, writing learning objectives). During the FDW new facilitators conduct mini-lessons as instructors, facilitate other instructors as they deliver mini-lessons, and participate as learners. The additional layer of feedback to the new facilitators, under the guidance of the FDW trainers, provides a challenging and rewarding learning experience. Facilitators learn how to organize the ISW at their own institution, practice using all the necessary video equipment, and practice developing appropriate mini-workshops on learning styles, feedback, collaborative learning, dealing with diversity, and other topics as needed. A draft Facilitator's Manual provides additional resources for the new facilitators. New facilitators are encouraged to 'team' with a more experienced facilitator for the first couple of workshops and to become members of a larger learning community of ISW Facilitators.

Some Comments from Participants on Summative Feedback Forms:

I found the following aspects of this workshop valuable:

- modeling instructional methods in all aspects of the sessions
- excellent environment for risk, fun
- mutual support & respect
- discussions & illustrations of various teaching practices
- insight into different learning styles
- spontaneous discussions of teaching/learning issues
- the fact that I learned new ways to enable learning—process focused on the student
- the mini-lesson format which provided great opportunities to try new methods and get instant feedback on what works and what doesn't

I would recommend this workshop to others because:

- it is what we do, & introduces great 'means' of appreciating & enjoying it that much better
- a deep, rich experience not only in what one learns from others, but in what one learns about oneself.
- great resources / great organization / practical / safe place to learn / constructive criticisms
- I would recommend this to others because of the exceedingly valuable lessons learned and the core group of like-minded colleagues met.
- it is a wonderful opportunity to expand approaches, knowledge, confidence and collegiality
- it is energizing, it is much more engaging//deeper than I anticipated
- it is revealing—it allows you to assess where you are as a teacher—gives you the tools to develop to where you want to go—INTERACTIVE—COLLEAGUES
- absolutely without a doubt spread the word. This workshop has something for every level of experience. Critical for new faculty.
- it takes into account such a wide variety of learning & teaching situations and it is applicable to all instructors regardless of their career stage, discipline, etc.

A specific example of how this workshop will change the way I teach is:

I will plan to do less

I will plan to be more

I will plan & reflect & respect the scholarship of teaching.

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