Continuing Education For Professional Growth

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Library, information, and media services personnel (hereinafter, "librarians") in North Carolina have a history of commitment to professional improvement through continuing education experiences.[1] The wide variety in scope, formats, and providers of these opportunities is apparent from those which are announced in *Tar Heel Libraries* and *North Carolina Libraries*. In North Carolina, as well as nationwide, continuing education, "the network of courses and programs offering educational assistance beyond the customary patterns of traditional schooling,"[2] has become the fastest growing component of our educational system. As the nature and needs of information users change, the librarian will increasingly need up-dating and retooling in an array of performance competencies. Therefore, it is not surprising that ALA's current priority in education is continuing education and that a staffed office for continuing education may become a permanent part of the ALA structure.

With the present and future need for quality continuing education experiences a certainty, North Carolina providers and recipients of continuing education should strive to insure that opportunities are systematically planned, implemented, and evaluated. The focus of this article will be upon various factors which should be considered in the pursuit of excellence in continuing education programs for librarians in North Carolina. Knowledge of these factors can help providers of continuing education programs improve their services. It can also help potential participants select those programs which will be most worthwhile to their learning.

Systematic Planning Following Specific Criteria

In the past, those continuing education experiences which have not been successful have likely failed to follow a systematic set of criteria for implementing continuing education programs and activities. The National Council on Quality Continuing Education for Information, Library, Media Personnel has identified the following:

1. The specific needs of the client group or individual have been assessed.
2. Specific, measurable, and/or observable learning objectives have been stated in one or more of the following areas: (1) changes in attitude and approach to the solution of problems; (2) acquisition (or mastery) of new knowledge or the revision of outdated knowledge in specific skills, techniques, and procedures.
3. The program is systematically designed and delivered to meet the statement of objectives.
4. The program content is current and timely.

5. The educational offering is promoted responsibly.
6. Evaluation is an on-going and integral part of the education offering.[3]

CRITERION 1: NEEDS ASSESSMENT

In designing meaningful continuing education experiences, it is absolutely essential to identity the specific needs and interests of the client group or individual. There are certainly many methods to do this, e.g., interviews, questionnaires, the use of sensitive consultants, self-diagnosis, gaining insights from supervisors of participants, asking subject experts or professional association executives. The key factor appears to be that the participant him/herself perceive the need for the educational experience.[4] If a librarian does not internalize the need for new skills or the need for changes in his/her performance, the continuing education experience may appear to be imposed and may not be successful with that individual. A major challenge for the continuing education provider is to help librarians make the transition from staff development for renewal credits to staff development for professional growth.[5]

Two major considerations must be acknowledged here: (1) Professionals are by nature conservative; i.e., we adopt successful ways of working on a daily basis and are, therefore, resistant to changes in the comfortable status quo. Continuing education providers need to arm themselves with a repertoire of methods to motivate librarians to cope with the psychological threats which change may hold. (2) The continuing education provider must identify as specifically as possible the needs of the client group or individual as they relate to a particular topic. Many workshops have recently been held across North Carolina on library services for special users. Questions related to a workshop on this topic for the design of appropriate experiences should be: how much does the participant already know/need to know/want to know about the following (or other) topics: materials about the handicapped, materials for the handicapped, facilities design, or services for a specific group (blind, visually impaired, deaf, etc.)? Specific identification of the needs of the target audience could reduce the following reactions: "What does he take us for? We knew that already," or "Be that as it may, it certainly does not apply to my library."

CRITERION 2: OBJECTIVES

Objectives for the continuing education experience should relate directly to the results of the needs assessment and should specify clearly to the participants the intended outcomes. They should be reasonable, relevant, and attainable and should be stated so that they can be evaluated. Immeasurable psychic benefits can be derived from knowing that you have achieved or have the skills to achieve the intended outcomes.[6] Furthermore, when objectives are stated publicly and sufficiently in advance of the continuing education program, the voluntary participants can determine the extent to which they already know/need to know/want to know about the specific topic. Some of the most meaningful continuing education experiences for librarians in North Carolina

are the conferences of such associations as NCLA, NCASL, LRA, and the North Carolina Chapter of SLA, among others. The continued success of these programs will certainly be predicated upon the careful assessment of participants and the design and presentation of sessions which "just cannot be missed."

CRITERION 3: DESIGN AND PRESENTATION

After needs have been assessed and objectives established for the client group, the continuing education provider has the awesome and exciting challenge of identifying the most effective personnel, methods, materials, time, and location for the program. Frequently, the most successful (and costeffective) presenter(s) can be found in one's own institution or system. These continuing education providers may be more cognizant of the true needs of the participants and more sensitively attuned to the feedback from the participants. In any event, the presenter(s) must be knowledgeable of and prepared to address the specific objectives of the program. Principles of adult education, including involvement, self-direction, and reinforcement ("hands-on and handouts") should be incorporated as much as possible.[7] Continuing education providers should strive to limit: one-way communication, the "hit and run, lecture and leave 'em style;" the use of film projectors as "magic lanterns" while denying the potential power of personal interplay between presenters and participants; and last, but not least, "those downright dishonest promoters whose ingenious come-ons all too often attain their purpose, which is to separate good money from gullible customers.[8]

CRITERION 4: TIMELINESS

The concepts presented should certainly be consistent with current ideas, trends, and facts, and should be reviewed periodically to assure that they are indeed accurate and related to accepted practices and techniques. Not all of the 400 transparencies designed for library problems in 1971 may be relevant to 1981.

CRITERION 5: PROMOTION

The vast array of workshops, institutes, short courses, term courses, and other continuing education experiences offered in North Carolina need to be broadly and systematically promoted so that the audience that may best benefit from the activity knows the specific nature of the program with sufficient lead time to make plans to participate. All too many excellent programs are not publicized extensively enough or concretely enough for the potential audience to take advantage of the program. Continuing education providers should certainly make increased use of *Tar Heel Libraries* and *North Carolina Libraries* and should consider the following: local school or public library systems could alert neighboring systems to their programs; extension divisions of colleges, universities, and community colleges could more extensively publicize on-site and field-based offerings; and North Carolina should consider

the feasibility of establishing a statewide clearinghouse of information on continuing education activities of all types which might be appropriate for librarians' needs. In any event, the continuing education promoter should include information related to the following in publicity materials: scope, objectives, and methods, level of the offering, qualifications of the presenter(s), location, time, and schedule of activities, an itemization of costs, the amount and type of credit offered, and the needed preparation for the program.[9]

CRITERION 6: EVALUATION

Evaluation of continuing education activities should certainly be based on the stated objectives and should be designed to assess both the process and outcomes of the learning experience. The appropriateness of methods, materials, facilities, and presenters needs to be assessed and the results used to improve future programs. Since the intent of most continuing education activities is long-term change in job performance, continuing education providers need diligently to establish longitudinal evaluation measures. A key question to ask participants at the completion of a continuing education activity is if there are any additional topics raised during the activity which they would like to see incorporated into future continuing education programs. Staff development programs can certainly take the "bullet approach," in which the direction, speed, and path are predetermined, but the "butterfly approach," in which the librarian directs the path in ways which are important to the individual, can lead to natural and gratifying results.[10]

Other Considerations For Improved Continuing Education In North Carolina

CLEARINGHOUSE AND STATE COUNCIL

As noted above, North Carolina should consider the development of a clearinghouse for information regarding continuing education activities in all disciplines which could be of value to North Carolina's librarians. The development and implementation of such a clearinghouse should be the responsibility of the State Library with the cooperation of the Division of Educational Media, State Department of Public Instruction, NCLA, and other major continuing education providers. The State Library should also consider the feasibility of forming a State Council in a close relationship with the National Council for Quality Continuing Education under the auspices of CLENE, Inc. In this way, at least one representative group within North Carolina would be committed "to the task of improving continuing education opportunities on a statewide interdisciplinary basis."[11] Many North Carolina librarians are certainly faced with continuing education needs which may best be met by continuing education providers in such fields as psychology, computer science, management, and English, to name a few.

Another function the Council should perform is approval of continuing education providers (i.e., those who have documented evidence of following the six criteria listed above) to enable participants to take advantage of the CLENE

Library, Information, Media System Continuing Education Registry. The CLENE Registry, a part of the American College Testing (ACT) Program National Registry, can maintain an economical and efficient voluntary record of all credit and non-credit continuing education experiences a librarian undertakes.

ALTERNATIVE METHODS OF DELIVERY

A major barrier to access to continuing education activities for many North Carolina librarians is geography. The great distances in our state, compounded by ever-increasing transportation costs, necessitate the development of non-traditional methods of delivery of continuing education options. An additional consideration is the recommendation which will be made to the 1981 White House Conference on Aging that more educational programs by "electronic media" should be provided for older adults in their homes.[12] Therefore, colleges and universities should consider more field-based offerings; more regional workshops, such as those sponsored by the Division of Educational Media, State Department of Public Instruction, should be made available; and more validated self-instructional modules should be developed. Careful use should be made of the power of instructional design, print and non-print packages, radio, and open-circuit and closed-circuit television capabilities. The insights gained from the North Carolina Rural Renaissance Project could be invaluable to other continuing education providers.

QUALITY AND QUALITY CONTROL

A responsibility of the major continuing education providers, e.g., the State Library, the Division of Educational Media, certain colleges and universities, committees of NCLA, and others, is to provide education in the dynamics of continuing education for other potential continuing education providers.[13] As indicated here, quality continuing education experiences are not achieved accidentally. Everyone with responsibility for designing even a one-hour workshop should be competent to manage the series of complex steps required.

The more sensitive issue of quality control also needs increased attention among continuing education providers.[14] The sponsor of a continuing education program, such as NCLA through its conferences, has the obligation to insure quality offerings. Using NCLA as an example, an association with sufficient lead time for planning conference programs, the following efforts to control quality could be undertaken: (1) any group or individual proposing a program should submit a detailed plan which addresses the six criteria enumerated above; (2) members of the program planning committee, who should have considerable expertise as continuing education providers, should critique the plan, suggest needed modifications, and reject any plans which do not hold much promise for quality; (3) the committee should engage in a systematic *post-hoc* evaluation to ascertain the strengths and areas for improvement of each program; and (4) these data should be used for improving the entire quality control process.

CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR OTHER AUDIENCES

North Carolina is currently in a position to develop a heirarchy of roles and responsibilities for continuing education providers, ranging from the State Library and the Division of Educational Media, to colleges, universities, and technical institutes, to state, regional, and local professional associations and clubs, to local systems and institutions. It is also becoming increasingly clear that we need to assume more responsibility at all of these levels for designing and promoting pertinent continuing education experiences for persons other than librarians. The successful improvement of library services in our state will be contingent upon the broad awareness and appropriate competencies of many groups, e.g., principals, teachers, trustees, institutional administrators, school boards, superintendents, and especially library support staff.

A REQUEST TO CONTINUING EDUCATION PARTICIPANTS

One of the most difficult things for adults to do is to admit that we do not know something. If, however, we are to be agents for change in our libraries, we must be open to change ourselves. If you do not know something which you feel you should know, find someone who can help you, with no apology. If that person does help you, express pleasure; if not, express disappointment. Assert your *right* to continuing education. Administrators, please note: just as a librarian is a professional who engages in reference, organization, management, production, bibliographic, etc., functions, so is the librarian a professional who engages in continuing education for professional growth and improved library services for North Carolinians.[15]

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References

1. Continuing education is here defined as planned learning experiences utilized by individuals subsequent to their pre-service education. It is a generic term which includes staff development as one of its elements. Similarly, in-service training and orientation are subsets under staff development. Whereas continuing education takes as its base the individual, staff development uses as its base the development of the group as it relates to the total organizational system. Continuing education opportunities include both formal and informal learning situations, and need not be limited to library subjects or the offerings of information science schools.
National Council on Quality Continuing Education for Information, Library, Media Personnel, *A Program for Quality in Continuing Education for Information, Library, and Media Personnel: Policy Statement, Criteria for Quality and Provider Approval System* (Washington, D.C.: Author, 1980), 1:15.
2. Continuing Education Council, *Quality Control in Continuing Education* (Richmond, Virginia: Author, 1978): 26.
3. National Council, 1:4-5.
4. Charles W. Beegle and Roy A. Edelfelt, eds, *Staff Development: Staff Liberation* (Washington, D.C.: ASCD, 1977): 83.
5. Ibid., p. 82.
6. Ben M. Harris, *Improving Staff Performance Through In-Service Education* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1980): 10.

7. Nancy Polette, *In-Service, School Library/Media Workshops and Conferences* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow, 1973), p. 3.
8. Continuing Education Council, p. 26.
9. National Council, 1:5.
10. Beegle and Edelfelt, pp. 95-96.
11. For an extended discussion of this concept, see National Council, Volume Two.
12. Beverly T. Watkins, "Education Found Unused by Adults Who Need It Most," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 21 (December 15, 1980): p.6.
13. Louis J. Rubin, *Improving In-Service Education: Proposals and Procedures for Change* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971): 269.
14. National Council, Volume Two.
15. An uncited but invaluable source is Ben M. Harris, et. al, *In-Service Education: A Guide to Better Practice* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J. : Prentice-Hall, 1969).