Preface

Professional development should be what educators do every day, not just on Wednesday afternoon when the students are gone and the curtain rises on yet another speaker with a PowerPoint and some information to impart. Teachers and administrators spend too many such afternoons in passive mode, perhaps listening to someone *telling them* they have to get the kids more involved. The irony is not lost on teachers who may be all too familiar with sessions devoted to the *fad du jour*. First-year teachers may pay attention, but the veterans go to a better place in their minds. Out come the knitting needles, yet-to-be-graded tests or essays, or a good novel long neglected. Time passes—if slowly—and even the new teachers begin to wonder what was really accomplished. If face-to-face professional-development sessions are to be successful, they must be *work*shops devoted to learning on the part of teachers and the students they serve.

Continuous improvement involves *doing*, assessing, revising, and then *doing* once more—with the adjustments or modifications built in. Anything that accelerates growth and improves the performance of teachers and students should be welcomed by all stakeholders, but any meeting or professional-development session that fails to consider what happens in the classroom may have little impact. Workshops *can be accelerants to continuous improvement if what is learned there gets used with students as part of an overall commitment to learning.*

Improvement on the part of teachers and administrators is directly related to process. It is the *how* and *how well* we do what we do on a daily basis that counts most. Fullan (2010) puts it well: "To get anywhere, you have to *do* something" (p. 32). Once something has been done in the classroom or schoolhouse, it bears looking into. This is where the reflective conversation comes into play: How did it go? Did it accomplish the objectives? Were the kids—or adults—engaged?

Were there some things that could be improved next time around? Were there some processes that worked well enough to be incorporated in the *next* lesson or professional-development session? Analyze the data, survey the teachers, ask the students, consult the parents—all in the interest of moving everything and everyone inexorably forward.

As we move further into the 21st century, the kinds of accelerants available for continuous improvement increase almost daily. Search engines like Google make it possible to get information on anything immediately. The social studies teacher who needs information on Thomas Jefferson can, at the click of a mouse, receive more hits than it is possible to plow through in a short period of time. With wireless readers, like Apple's iPad, Amazon's Kindle, or the Sony Reader, books can be downloaded in a matter of seconds (Does anyone remember interlibrary loan?). Courses and professional-development activities are available online, and educators from all over the country can interact with a keyboard or verbally, through the magic of the Internet and ever-clearer web imagery and audio.

With all these wonderful electronic advances and opportunities, there is still a role for face-to-face workshops. As long as teachers face students in classrooms, *those teachers need to have modeled for them the kind of instructional delivery methods most effective with today's students*. If long periods of lecture are not instructionally effective, then face-to-face professional development sessions where lecture is the main mode of delivery are counterproductive. I attended a two-hour session on *making effective presentations* where the session leader essentially read from transparencies in a darkened room. (In the dictionary next to the word *irony* . . .)

Students who control their own afterschool activities, follow images on multiple screens that change every couple of seconds, and believe they are capable of doing several things simultaneously—and electronically—no longer have any patience with passive classrooms. High school teachers who lecture for much or most of a 90-minute block will lose the attention of their students one at a time until most of the kids are in a better place in their minds. Two of the basic understandings of the five books in *The Active Classroom Series* are that classrooms should be places where kids can move as part of an intentional program, process information in pairs and groups, question what they see and hear, understand that not every question has a "right" answer, laugh frequently, and constantly function outside their comfort zone—all in a safe environment. The most successful teachers I know get this; they work movement and structured conversation into their classrooms, even as—by their

actions—they value curiosity, discovery, engagement, and risk taking as continuous-improvement accelerators.

Those who conduct workshops need to acknowledge that their adult audiences have changed as well. It is no longer advisable for workshop facilitators to simply stand in front of the lectern, adjust the microphone, and *talk at* a room full of adults in an attempt to "provide information." I often ask teachers if they can remember a time when they sat in a three-hour college classroom, listening to a college instructor read from a PowerPoint. Almost every hand goes up. They may have thought to themselves: *If you are going to read from this PowerPoint for the rest of the evening, and for the remainder of the semester, why not just give me the PowerPoint file, and we can all go home*? I have attended conference sessions where more than half the participants left at the break. The answer for many session facilitators is simply to avoid giving participants the break; *rather than change the delivery, they punish the attendees*. This is not rocket science; workshops and seminars can be full of energy, or they can be full of people who want to leave early.

No matter the workshop content, if there are teachers in attendance, every workshop is the perfect opportunity for facilitators to engage in the kind of instruction *that teachers need to use with today's kids*. Educators who have, over the years, become cynical about the effectiveness of workshops can be excused if their role in those sessions is passive in nature. Workshops have to be framed in such a way that teachers clearly understand their *purpose and utility*. According to Allen (2008), workshop participants have to know *why* they are there and *how* what they learn will help them (p. 4). If those questions are not answered, teachers will ultimately do what students do in the same position—drop in and tune out.

Over almost 40 years, I have facilitated workshops for tens of thousands of teachers, administrators, teacher assistants, substitute teachers, and classified employees. As a classroom teacher, I taught every grade from 7 through 12. If I were to use a Venn diagram to compare and contrast adult learners and K–12 students, there is one thing they would all have in common: *Most kids and adults hate sitting in passive classrooms while someone else does all the work*. If we want our teachers to involve and engage their students in the learning, then those among us who facilitate workshops for adults need to *model the kind of active pedagogical techniques and strategies that can accomplish that*.

Teachers need to leave workshops with strategies they can use to benefit students; the best way for them to learn the strategies is to have them modeled during the sessions. Administrators—central

office or building level—need to develop a plan for seeing to it that what gets taught gets used *and evaluated* in an attempt to accelerate improvement. Teachers can attend several excellent workshops during the course of the school year, but it is what happens *between* workshops that counts. If teachers judge that what they just learned can be implemented, if they then try it and observe what happens, and if they subsequently take the time to reflect (individually or collaboratively) on how it can be improved—they will better appreciate the learning experience that made it possible. They may also actually look *forward* to the next workshop, safe in the knowledge that it made a difference last time.

For workshops to be truly memorable and ultimately effective, those conducting them must take into account a whole host of things critical to their success. It is not enough to have a good set of notes and a colorful PowerPoint presentation. It is not enough to have good information to impart. It is not enough to provide food and door prizes. Properly conducted workshops can serve as accelerants to improvement, but the workshop facilitator must spend adequate time planning how to reach and engage educators in a way that makes them feel their time was well spent.

Chapter 1: Set the Stage

When I first began conducting workshops about 20 years ago, I thought all I needed was a great message, an adequate set of notes, and someone to listen to what I had to say. It never occurred to me to ask other questions related to the session: How do adults learn best? Was the venue adequate? Did I need to do something in advance to facilitate learning? We'll look at how to create a total environment conducive to learning for adults—and we'll find that it is not much different from the kind of environment that supports *student* learning.

Chapter 2: Hit the Ground Running

A powerful opening sets the stage for the rest of the workshop. Walking up to a lectern, testing the microphone, asking if someone in the back can hear you, and proceeding to open a binder or PowerPoint may not signal that anything memorable is about to happen. In this chapter, we'll explore first impressions and high-energy openings that will give participants reason to hope this workshop will be different, effective, and ultimately supportive.

Chapter 3: Maximize Movement

If there is one theme that runs through *The Active Classroom Series*, it is movement as a process tool. This chapter will explore the connection between movement and cognition, and we'll provide plenty of strategies to get workshop participants up and moving immediately and frequently. We'll also explore ways to make certain there is enough physical space in the workshop venue to move, get into pairs or groups, and share.

Chapter 4: Minimize Distractions

In smoothly functioning workshops, distractions are kept to a minimum. Some are physical (lighting, temperature, placement of audiovisuals, etc.). Others are created by the workshop facilitator (verbal and nonverbal distracters, disconcerting graphics, or negative body language). In this chapter, we'll examine the whole notion of process flow as a critical component of a successful and effective workshop.

Chapter 5: Facilitate Structured Conversations

There are few workshop topics that the educators in attendance don't know something—and perhaps a good deal—about. Good workshop facilitators take advantage of this prior knowledge by incorporating it into structured and reflective conversations. The facilitator can work new information into the mix, assisting in the formation of *new* knowledge, effectively constructed on the foundation of the old.

In this chapter, we'll look at ways to facilitate these conversations in pairs, quartets, and whole groups.

Chapter 6: Present With Confidence

When workshop facilitators function as powerful presenters, this represents value added for participants. In this chapter, we'll examine the critical role played by voice, facial expressions, body language, gestures, movement, and silence. We'll also introduce strategies that workshop facilitators can utilize when working in pairs.

Chapter 7: Close the Deal

Nothing, I have found, focuses the mind like the relating of a good story. Stories can be used to illustrate a point, and the use of a content-related story serves to enhance memory. If there is one thing better than a good story, it is one laced with humor. In this chapter, we'll see what storytelling and laughter do to invigorate any workshop.

Chapter 8: Extend the Learning

Powerful and effective workshops don't just run out of steam after the allotted time. Good facilitators see the last 10% of the workshop as a time to bring it all together in a way that will make the conclusion as memorable and powerful as the opening. If there is to be follow-up on the part of administrators or the workshop facilitator, this is the time to clarify the what, when, and how of the next step in the process—*and there needs to be a next step in the process.*

Face-to-face workshops can be powerful components in an ongoing and dynamic professional-development program at the building and district level. The key is to take the time to understand how they will fit into the total picture and to make certain that whatever is planned in the immediate aftermath of the workshop *actually happens*. For the payoff to be substantial, *someone* has to plan *something* that will extend the learning. The educators who facilitated the workshop may be part of that follow-up, but follow-up there must be. Otherwise, there will be a small percentage of workshop participants who will actually reflect on and *use* what they learned.

Participants can leave a workshop with more than they came in with, but tradition is a powerful force. Unless plans have been made to transfer that new knowledge into the classroom, its effects will be minimal as the tide of "what we have always done" moves inexorably back, having receded only momentarily in the space of one day, afternoon, or evening. For their part, workshop facilitators owe it to participants to provide sessions that are highly memorable and ultimately useful.