

The *Constructivist Design* Model for Professional Development

Patrick Flynn, Institute for Learning Centered Education
James Shuman, St. Lawrence University

Abstract

Constructivist Design is a professional development model that responds to the call for "new models of staff development to emerge" that emphasize learner centered strategies (Hammond and McLaughlin, Kappan 1995). Elements of this unique professional development model - its goals, and its outcomes for participants and their school districts - are described, including its original development in 1995 by the *Institute for Learning Centered Education*.

Background

Constructivist Design is a professional development model instituted in 1995 by the Institute for Learning Centered Education. The model was initially conceived and developed by four educators associated with the Institute – Pat Flynn, Terry Mazany, Nick Donahue, and Don Mesibov – for use at a professional development conference held in Grand Island, New York. Following its initial success, the model has been continually enhanced, not only by Flynn, Mazany, Donahue, and Mesibov, but by other educators associated with the annual week-long conferences spawned by the initial one at Grand Island.

Goals and Outcomes

The two interrelated goals of **Constructivist Design** are 1) to provide teams of educators with a structured process which enables them to accomplish a self-identified task for implementation later in their home school, and 2) to immerse these educators in professional development by engaging them in research-based constructivist educational strategies to accomplish their task. Reflecting these goals, the outcomes of implementing the model are two-fold as well: 1) an educational “product” specifically designed and developed by educators for implementation in their own school or district, and 2) professional development in research-based “best practices” that can be applied in the local setting.

Elements of the Model

Constructivist Design includes the following elements:

- Teamwork among 3-8 educators at a 5-day conference
- A task or project self-selected prior to the conference based on local needs
- An outside facilitator assigned by the conference staff
- The facilitator helps the team to:
 - Identify goals to accomplish the project
 - Develop a rubric to self-evaluate effectiveness of the week's work
 - Develop a graphic organizer to guide the development of their task
 - Develop a timeline for completion of the project
 - Research, propose, and develop solutions
- The **Constructivist Design** model also includes elements that assist teams to:
 - Interact with expert resources in the field of education
 - Engage others in constructive criticism of the proposed solutions
 - Self-reflect continually through journaling
 - Finalize a solution for the project
 - Make plans for implementation at the home school or district
 - Exhibit their finished work at the culmination of the 5-day intensive

The 5-day conference also features:

- A technology-rich setting designed for teamwork
- Extensive time devoted to facilitated project development
- A daily variety of hour-long presentations by experts on the practical application of constructivist theory.
- Opportunity for teams to confer individually with these experts
- Networking with like-minded educators
- An enjoyable work-related professional atmosphere

Constructivist Design Today

Since 1995, the Institute for Learning Centered Education has sponsored a **Constructivist Design** Conference each summer for up to 50 teams of educators. In 2003, the Institute joined with St. Lawrence University, Niagara University, and the St. Lawrence Valley Teachers Learning Center to establish the *Learner Centered Resource Collaborative*, which now sponsors the annual conference. The conference has been identified as one of the most beneficial professional development opportunities available to educators today. Registration for the 2007 conference is currently underway.