Professional Development Using Modified EdCamp

Ever since my first EdCamp experience 3 years ago I’ve wanted to bring that concept into our school’s professional development. Last fall at EdCamp Chicago I even proposed and attended a session on EdCamp style PD for your own school. Through sharing of ideas and experiences, we felt the best way to approach this style in our own schools was by having presenters for multiple sessions and allowing teachers to choose which of those sessions they wanted to attend. As we discussed this at EdCamp Chicago in April, Mo Ferger – @Ferger314 encouraged us to be aware of the difference between volun’told’ & volunteered. When teachers are volun’told’ to present, they sometimes lack the passion of someone who wants to share their story.

Creating Modified EdCamp

Last month, I got the gift I’ve been waiting for. Our Principal proposed that we change up our traditional professional development and provide an opportunity for faculty to have more choice for PD – proving once again that he’s not only forward thinking, but that he follows me on Twitter and we’re on the same page. We would create 8 sessions, and allow faculty to choose the 4 sessions they had the most interest in. We decided to provide 4 sessions that focused more on EdTech, and 4 that focused on strategies. Each session would be an introduction to that app, tool, or strategy. Since this was presented in the Spring, we felt teachers could have more time to investigate and work with these things in order to prepare for next year. We also wanted to keep sessions small, so we agreed on a 12 teacher limit per session. If we had all 4 sessions fill for that topic, we would allow that topic to have more than 12.

The Presenters
One concern with teachers presenting, is that if you present – you can’t attend other sessions. So, as we asked teachers to present we offered to give them a partner. This way they could present 2 sessions, and still attend their top 2 choices. Interestingly enough, many teachers started with that plan, and then decided to collaborate and present together. The requests to present were made in a face to face conversation. Since we had never done this before, I describe the format, and explained they were being asked to present because of the success they’ve had with the app, tool, or strategy. The teachers were more willing to present when they understood this wasn’t a ‘how to’ session, but an opportunity to share why they use something in class, and how it helps their students.

Google Forms & Add-ons to the Rescue

At first we discussed allowing teachers to register for the 4 topics of their choice and then placing them in sessions. Although spending hours upon hours distributing teachers into sessions sounded like a great time, I used a Google Form (click here for the template) and some awesome add-ons.

I created a Google Form which automatically collected they email address, and had 4 multiple choice questions. Each question was simply – Time Slot A, Time Slot B, etc... The answer choices were the titles of the sessions being offered. Example: Room 130 – Becoming a Connected Educator.

Since we only wanted 12 teachers in each session (per time slot), I used the Choice Eliminator add-on for Google Forms which eliminates an answer choice from the question once it hits your predetermined limit. With the new Google Forms it was easy to see what percentage of teachers was signing up for each session through the charts. Although, teachers could, and did, send themselves a copy of their responses, we needed to adjust some session sizes manually.
After adjusting a few session sizes, I was ready to send everyone their schedules on the day of the professional development. I copied the data into a different Google Sheet and used the FormMule add-on which emailed each teacher their completed schedule.

Sharing Resources

Since we use Schoology Enterprise, and I have a Professional Development Group setup for all faculty & staff, I created a folder for each session title and allowed teachers and the presenters to share resources in this location. If you don’t use Schoology, Google Docs would also be a very good tool to share these resources – just like we use at EdCamps. Simply create a Google Doc with all 8 sessions listed in a table. Create a link for each session that opens a separate doc where your presenters and participants can post their resources, questions, comments, etc...

The Feedback

At the end of the day I emailed the link to their Exit Ticket (click here for the template) and asked everyone to complete it prior to leaving their final session. When I opened the responses, I was blown away.

The summary of feedback looked like this:

- 96% of teachers responded that they really liked the format.
- Teachers asked for the sessions to be longer so they had more time on the topic.
- Teachers asked to have an opportunity to work together within the sessions.
- Move this format to the beginning of the year so we can try these things out right away.

Personally I walked away from this experience with the following knowledge:

- We will definitely do this again
- Sessions should be a minimum of 30 minutes (ours were 20)
- I need to meet with all presenters to ensure participants will have a hands-on experience
- Participants need to know where the resource materials are ahead of time
- Teachers enjoy PD when they have their choice of topics
- PersonalizedPD works! Thanks @jbretzmann @kennybosch @GustafsonBrad and the other authors of Personalized PD – Flipping Your Professional Development

How would you rate the overall experience of doing an inservice in this format?
(49 responses)