

Typical features of in-service workshops

Not all of these features are necessary in all in-service workshops, but most will be beneficial in all workshops, even if they are brief (it only takes 2-3 minutes to share your aims) or combined (e.g. prior experiences and beliefs can be explored together). The examples provided come from an imagined workshop on 'continuous assessment' (a way of assessing learning throughout the year, rather than just using exams at the end of it).

Feature (what?)	Example (how?)	Rationale (why?)
Aims / objectives / outcomes that are made clear to participants.	A slide stating the aims of the workshop in simple language.	This prepares us for learning, giving purpose to the workshop when we are most alert.
An opportunity for participants to reflect on their prior experience.	Participants discuss their experience of being assessed as students, both positive and negative.	All learning builds on prior knowledge. Exploring this provides both a means for us to fit the new knowledge into existing schemata, and a context for the new ideas.
An opportunity for participants to examine their personal beliefs.	Participants read and discuss 10 statements about exams, and decide if they agree or disagree with each one.	Personal beliefs are known to have a strong impact on a teacher's practices. Such examination helps participants to develop critical thinking skills (esp. rationalising implicit beliefs), notice differences between theirs and others' opinions, and helps us to see any potential conflicts between their beliefs and the workshop aims.
Some new information / ideas that will be useful.	A handout/booklet on how to conduct continuous assessment, step-by-step.	This provides the stimulus for change. It may be factual, opinions of colleagues, a text or a video of a lesson.
Examples of the new information / ideas.	A case study of a teacher who used continuous assessment successfully.	This helps us to link abstract theory to practice, new ideas to the reality of our classroom.
An opportunity for participants to critique the new information / ideas.	Group debates, in which some participants argue for 'high stakes' exams, and others for continuous assessment.	This develops critical thinking skills. It also brings doubts, fears, scepticism out into the open, forcing participants to justify their position. Trainers can also use this for evaluation of 'resistance'.
An opportunity for participants to apply or demonstrate understanding of the new information / ideas.	Each participant opens their textbook/syllabus and thinks of tasks that would enable them to continuously assess 3 elements or units.	This brings us as close as we can get to putting the ideas into practice. We generate our own examples at this stage.



Opportunities for participants to exchange and compare ideas.	Participants read about each other's continuous assessment tasks in a gallery walk activity. Participants compare ideas after the beliefs activity above.	This can help scaffold the learning, raise participants' awareness of differences of opinion with colleagues, provide more examples, and create a social environment for learning.
Planning for the future.	Participants draft a timetable for their own class that they will implement before the follow-up workshop.	This commits participants to think about, and imagine, themselves implementing what they have learnt. It can even create a contract between teacher and trainer.
Evaluation of achievement of workshop aims at the end.	Several questions on a slide at the end for groups to discuss and write answers to on mini-whiteboards.	This raises participants' awareness of what they have learnt, and tells us where they may need further support.

Discuss:

1. What do you think about these stages? Which ones, in your experience, are most important?
2. Which do you think are unnecessary?
3. Are there any that you are sceptical about? Which ones? Why?

