



CPS-B TIPS the Scales in Indiana

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With contributions from:

Bill Littlejohn, Sonja Frantz and Bonnie Buddle

Over the past eighteen months, the Creative Problem Solving Group - Buffalo (CPS-B) and the Blumberg Center for Interdisciplinary Studies in Special Education at Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana, have had the pleasure of working together on a project that is changing the face of how government and education work to mobilize social and educational services for children and families in Indiana. During this project, we have provided nine training programs (five days each). Upon completing the second year, nearly 200 key leaders from state and local level educational and governmental agencies in Indiana will have been trained in facilitating the current version of Creative Problem Solving (CPS).

The first year of training was part of the Community-Based Care program supported by a grant from the Indiana Department of Education, Office of Special Education in conjunction with the Indiana Collaboration Project, a White House initiative focused on redefining government and sponsored by the Indiana Family and Social Services Administration. The second year of training was supported by Training in Problem Solving (TIPS), a State of Indiana grant designed to teach CPS facilitation to state and local employees who are responsible for the mobilization of social and educational services to families and children. TIPS is funded by the Indiana Department of Education, Division of Special Education, and is hosted by the Blumberg Center.

CPS-B has trained a team of CPS facilitators provided by the Blumberg Center to deliver the training programs. It has been extremely rewarding for all of us to hear the stories people share about the impact this training has had at a state-wide level. As a result, we thought it would be beneficial to share some of these stories as examples of the impact training in CPS facilitation has had in state government and educational settings.

Numerous people have participated in this highly impactful intervention and it is impossible to identify all of them in this article. However, three people will be featured who have made significant contributions to the project's success. They will report their views on the impact of the training. Bill Littlejohn's perspective is through a state-wide lens. Bonnie Buddle represents a community focus, and Sonja Frantz provides an individual point-of-view.

Bill Littlejohn, Director of the Blumberg Center and our host for these programs, has served as a table facilitator at all but one of the programs. In March, he sent a letter to the Group president, Scott Isaksen, to convey commendations. The following is an excerpt from his letter and is used to provide a general reaction to the training. He writes:

As director of the Blumberg Center, I am responsible for building and maintaining the Center's reputation for high quality products and training. The training provided through CPS-B is certainly making my job easy in these efforts! Your training is interactive; heavily steeped in experience; provides extensive materials for use after the training; and, provides advance materials which help to prepare the trainees.

The training provided by CPS-B is an exemplar of how to meet adult learning needs! The research and experiential bases of the process are evident throughout the five-day training programs. Your curriculum is strong and your trainers really make it work, especially given the challenges of the five consecutive, long days in our training. Our trainees evidence that the training is powerful and immediately applicable. CPS-B trainers are client-centered and have gone well beyond expectations to see that each trainee is successful in meeting his/her learning needs.

It is not easy to bring a group of adults, especially leaders, together for 5 consecutive, 8-plus-hour days! However, the word is out in Indiana. We do our training by invitation only because of our funding and have had to turn a number of persons away. We also have had a waiting list for the last three training programs and have added an additional program with funding from another agency. After just two programs in our first year, our funding source was hearing such tremendous feedback from persons trained, that we were asked to conduct the project for a second year. Recently, we were asked to continue the training for a third year. This is certainly good for our center's reputation. While we have received multiple years of funding for our other training projects, and have always been recognized for high-quality training in our other programs, we have never experienced reactions as extremely favorable as we are experiencing with Facilitating CPS.

Bonnie Buddle, Title I Teacher in Clay Community Schools, Brazil, Indiana and certified CPS Facilitator, has served as a table facilitator for many of the programs. She applies CPS extensively in her school and community. Recently, she applied her CPS expertise in her community which resulted in a major breakthrough for a Community Education Program. The following is only one example of the success she is having in applying CPS. She writes:

Our small community had been trying to get a Community Education program together for over 5 years. The public school district had taken on the project with little success. The community newspaper ran a survey to solicit interest in the program and very few surveys were returned. Since it was difficult to understand what the community wanted, the Community Education program was limited to a couple of computer classes.

When the community's largest employer started laying off workers, interest in a Community Education program was sparked again. A resource-group of 12 business and community members was brought together to generate many options for classes which could be included in a program. I facilitated the group.

The challenge was to focus the options down to a list of classes that would not only enrich members of the community, but also make them more employable. Availability of instructors, facilities, and cost also had to be considered. Special care was taken to make sure all of the resource members felt that their contributions had been valued.

I helped the group focus by generating and selecting criteria to be used for selecting classes. After attaining group consensus on seven criteria, the resource-group narrowed the options from 200 to the 25 most promising.

Then I had the group generate sources of assistance and resistance, such as people, places and things that could help or get in the way of a new Community Education program. As a result, the resource-group planned an entire set of courses detailed with instructors, facilities and enrollment. After a 90-minute meeting, the group had a ten-course offering for the Spring, plus a set of criteria for all future class selection. Something that had been elusive for five years was attained in 90 minutes with the application of CPS.

Sonja Frantz, Project Manager for the Blumberg Center, has also served as table facilitator for all the programs. Her training has had a powerful impact on her work with children with special needs and college students. When asked how she has integrated CPS in her world, she provided a list of specific examples. A subset of those examples are provided below. She writes:

As Project Manager mid-way through the first year of this project, the funder requested that we train for a second year (and now a third!). This request was based on positive impact information shared by people trained in CPS here in Indiana, and the benefits that CPS application has brought to them in their jobs as mobilizers of social and educational services to families and children.

As a professional and individual, my mission is to support the potentialization of others, and the CPS method delivered by the extraordinary CPS-B trainers and facilitation team does just that. The training team sets the affirming atmosphere and provides the problem-solving tools that participants can emulate when they themselves facilitate groups of professionals collaboratively with families and children.

In this work, I have accomplished the following types of outcomes:

- in Special Education child conferences. The average length of meetings has been reduced by half. The time reduction is due primarily to applying the Understanding the Problem component of CPS to identify student, parent and staff needs. Also, people in the meetings report higher levels of satisfaction from the meetings.
- in the development of Individual Education Plans (IEP's) for students with disabilities. Sources of Assistance and Resistance have been used to strengthen the implementation plans for accomplishing student's educational goals and objectives.
- in my college classroom. As a college instructor, my students and I have used brainstorming to develop unique formats to evaluate performance, such as videotapes, brochures, interviews with children and volunteers, and teaching demonstrations.
- to evaluate and improve college class sessions. I apply the ALoU tool at the end of class sessions for evaluation and improvement, particularly to get student feedback on various methods or teaching formats I use.
- to improve story telling and writing. I have taught the morphological matrix and used generating and selecting criteria with pre-school students to improve their story-telling and writing processes. As a result, "every student has a story to tell."

Sonja Frantz is one person affecting the lives of many through the application of CPS and her many other talents. Bonnie Buddle is impacting her school and her community. Bill Littlejohn, with the help of many others, is impacting state government. Nearly 200 people have been trained as CPS facilitators in Indiana through this initiative and are helping to transform how state government works. CPS is making a difference, a BIG difference in Indiana!