are confronted with increased academic diversity. The range of skills in any one classroom renders instructional planning and delivery very, very difficult. Teachers struggle to keep instruction matched to the level of skill development of the students in their classroom. New computer-adaptive achievement measures enable school personnel to pinpoint instructional levels and to deliver instruction matched to those levels. New technology-enhanced progress monitoring systems enable continuous monitoring of student performance and daily provision to teachers and administrators of the information they need to adapt and individualize instruction. The pace of developing and implementing this technology is fast, and will continue to get faster.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

None of my achievements has been accomplished in isolation. Rather, all of the work is the result of the efforts of teams of researchers including highly talented colleagues and exceptionally capable graduate students. I have been given the opportunity to be in the right place at the right time. I am convinced that there are no limits on what children can accomplish and I believe it is time for all of us, together with our colleagues in multiple disciplines, to raise our expectations and increase our efforts to enhance the competence of all children and youth and to redouble our efforts to help systems, broadly speaking, build the capacity to meet students' needs. ■

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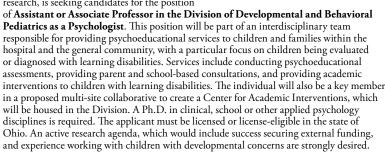
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COMMUNICATION MATTERS

Putting Your Best Face Forward: Making Effective Presentations

BY ANDREA COHN

School psychologists are often called upon to give presentations to staff, parents, or other stakeholders such as school board members or local politicians. The purpose can range from providing simple strategies on a specific issue to advocating for support (policy and funding) for a particular program. While all presentations are genuine opportunities to get our messages and expertise out, not all of us are natural born public speakers who can jump in and engage a group on any topic. Imagining your audience in their underwear or finding a friendly face in the crowd might not be enough to make you an effective presenter. Being purposeful in creating your presentation by knowing your audience and focusing your messages will help you put together the most effective presentation to meet your communication needs.

Most important in creating your presentation is to craft a message that is relevant to your audience and the population you serve, and that promotes the role of the school psychologist. As school psychologists, we must be our own best advocates in every aspect of our professional practice. Consider how your presentation reinforces the essential role of the school psychologist. Check out references below for resources on crafting effective key messages.

VENUES

There are numerous situations that would require a school psychologist to make a presentation. Probably the most common is for staff development within a school psychologist's own school. Other venues might include:

- PTA or other parent meetings. A school psychologist would present to parents to inform about a topic of concern, seek volunteers to assist with classroom-based interventions, or instruct about building-wide interventions.
- School board meetings. A school psychologist might meet with members of the district school board to defend the need to maintain or increase school psychology positions, garner support for a district-wide change such as a response-to-intervention framework, or inform about the role of the school psychologist.
- Parent education classes. School psychologists might lead classes for parents on such topics as positive parenting, effective discipline, supporting academic success at home, or recognizing signs of stress.
- Community meetings. School psychologists can help forge connections between the school and community agencies by presenting on the role of the school psychologist or issues of concern to the community such as safety.

KNOW YOUR AUDIENCE

As in any form of communications planning, it is key to know your audience and to speak to its priorities. First, be sure to tailor your language to reflect the prior knowledge base of the group to which you are speaking. Avoid using too much professional jargon or abbreviations, unless you are speaking to a crowd of school psychologists. If you are presenting to an unknown or unfamiliar audience, consider spending time at the outset of your presentation to gather information about prior knowledge about the issue and expectations for the presentation. If possible, attend one of the group's meetings prior to your presentation so that you might get a feel for how best to approach this audience.

Finally, consider the aspects of your presentation that might be challenging or potentially controversial to your audience. It is often helpful to present both sides of a controversy while avoiding taking a side, unless it is relevant to your key message. Decide ahead of time how you will handle confrontational comments or questions. In the event of a comment that appears to lend itself to extended or nonproductive argument, remind the audience that there are numerous perspectives on the particular issue that are outside the scope or time of the presentation and redirect to the intended purpose of the presentation.

Consider your audience's willingness to engage in interactive activities such as role plays, collaborative problem identification or solving, or brainstorming. These activities can lead to a more engaging and meaningful presentation. If your audience is not familiar with these types of activities, provide guidance and examples to avoid making your participants uncomfortable. Most school-based staff members are familiar with these types of activities and expect them as part of a presentation.

KNOW THE POTENTIAL CHALLENGES OF YOUR LOCATION

The location of your presentation can have a major impact on the success of your presentation. Consider the seating of the room: Would you like participants to be seated

in rows so that they can all see you and a screen well or would it be more beneficial to have them seated at tables so that they can easily engage in group activities? Also, consider from where you would like to present. Will you stand at a podium or head table and speak through a microphone or would you like the ability to walk throughout the room to interact with the audience? This will affect what types of notes you will be able to access during your presentation.

Be sure to get to your location early to make sure that you have everything that you need and that it is working properly. Test microphones, computers, projectors, remotes or clickers, and even lights. Ensure that you have water and a printout of your entire presentation in case of technical difficulties.

VISUALS, VISUALS, VISUALS

It is always wise to have a handout of your slides or important talking points for all audience members. These will be key if you experience any technological challenges. Additionally, having something in front of them on which to take notes will help maintain the interest of your audience. It also helps your message linger after you have finished your presentation. If you wish to conserve paper, consider distributing a brief handout and posting your entire presentation at a later date online or e-mailing it to interested participants. Be sure to bring more than enough handouts for all participants in your presentation. Include your contact information on your handouts so that participants can reach out to you with follow-up questions or comments.

If are you a presenting to a technologically skilled group, consider e-mailing or posting your presentation ahead of time and have members of the audience bring laptop computers to your presentation. In this case, make technology part of your presentation. Have participants seek out information online or even create something that they can take home with them as a starting point for follow-up work. For example, if presenting on creating personal webpages, have resources available so that members of the audience will go home with the beginnings of a personal webpage.

> While all presentations are genuine opportunities to get our messages and expertise out, not all of us are natural born public speakers who can jump in and engage a group on any topic. Imagining your audience in their underwear or finding a friendly face in the crowd might not be enough to make you an effective presenter.

GETTING YOURSELF ON THE AGENDA

Many of us have ideas or have identified needs in our schools or communities, but we do not have a preexisting forum or standing invitation to present. Start with staff that you work with on a daily basis. Offer yourself to administrators or team leaders as a source for "free" professional development. In a time of belt-tightening budgets, administrators are commonly finding that they have little to no money available for staff professional development. Meet with your administrator to review needs assessment information or consider school-wide needs, and brainstorm topics that you might present on that are relevant to the staff. This is something that helps reinforce your essential role in your school.

Reach out to the organizations that include your key audiences and seek opportunities to give presentations. Start with "friendly" groups or ones that have a natural connection to your role or message. There are times of the year when groups may be more interested in a speaker with a message related to children, education, or mental health. Take advantage of such national events such as Suicide Awareness Month, American Education Week, or National School Psychology Awareness Week as an impetus for your presentation.

KEY TIPS TO ENGAGE YOUR AUDIENCE

Here are additional points to help engage all participants in your presentation.

- Use local examples to support your key points. This will help members of your audience relate to the information that you are sharing and consider how it can be applied to their daily functioning.
- Share personal or professional stories to help elaborate your points. In conducting research to create your presentation, speak with colleagues to get examples for topics on which you might not have your own experiences.
- Eliminate jargon and professional abbreviations. Keep your language simple. Use sound bites that audience members will remember days after the presentation has ended.
- Use humor when appropriate to entertain audience members. However, don't force it. There is nothing as painful as a joke that results in no laughter.
- Utilize plants. Invite friends or colleagues to attend your presentation. While it is always comfortable to have a friendly face in the audience, it is also helpful to

suggest questions or comments that they might make to help encourage audience participation when there is silence.

- Review your presentation and eliminate anything that does not add to it. Shorter and simpler is always better. Be sure to leave time for questions and comments. Consider that many people will approach you after your presentation is over to ask specific or more personal questions. Leave time to build those personal relationships.
- Practice your presentation to determine expected time as well as any potential rough spots. Determine ahead of time what are the most important points and what you might skip if time runs short.
- Keep slides simple and font sizes large enough so it is easy for people to read all the text. Avoid trying to squeeze too much information or text onto one slide.
- Consider cultural issues within the content of your presentation as well as between yourself and the audience.

DEALING WITH NERVES

It is normal to be nervous prior to giving a presentation. Even the most experienced presenter may experience some butterflies in front of a large crowd. Nervousness results from increases in adrenaline which might also cause sweaty palms, flushed face, and increased heart rate. However, adrenaline also brings with it the ability to think faster on your feet and infuse more energy into your presentation. Remember, you do not look as nervous as you feel; the audience likely cannot see how you feel. Take time to breathe and slow down. Presenters have a tendency to speak very quickly when nervous and not take sufficient pauses to breathe. Consider using some tension releasing strategies prior to your presentation such as rolling your head, squeezing your hands, breathing deeply. Focus on the content, not on how nervous you are feeling. Practice so that you are confident in the material you are presenting.

BUILDING AN EFFECTIVE PRESENTATION

Presentations generally are divided into four segments:

- Introduction: Serves to draw the listener into the presentation. Some speakers use humor to do this. Another approach is to describe the urgency of the message ("Cuts in school psychology positions will critically affect those students most at risk for social isolation, school failure, or drop-out") or focus on a timely issue that interests your audience ("Tomorrow school starts, and we all have an important role in helping students succeed").
- Body of the presentation: Deliver your important messages with supporting facts and representative stories. Engage the audience in hands-on activities such as role-playing, think–pair–share, or brainstorming. Get the audience up out of their chairs and moving if possible. Use multiple types of media to deliver your message, including slides, videos, audio recordings, and reading materials.
- Conclusion: Encourage listeners to take action (this may mean support school psychology, implement the intervention you presented, set up consistent routines at home, etc.). Include an activity to help your participants consider how they will implement the information that they have learned. As part of your conclusion, have participants complete an evaluation of your presentation. Results of this evaluation will help you determine if you met your objectives in the presentation as well as help you make changes for future presentations. If technology permits, have participants complete an online survey using programs such as Survey Monkey. These ease work for tabulating the results as well as are more efficient for staff to complete.
- Question and answer: Try to anticipate the questions that might be asked and determine what points you'll make in your answers. Decide ahead of time if you will answer questions that are specific to an individual or school. If you feel that responses require extended conversation, set up a time to continue your discussion with the audience member.

Also, consider doing a presentation on the role of school psychologists and how you can be of help to various constituents. This information, which may seem basic to you, can help improve awareness among and collaboration with stakeholders. NASP has a newly updated PowerPoint presentation on "What Is a School Psychologist" that can be adapted and personalized to meet your needs. You can use this in conjunction with the handout entitled "Crafting Effective Presentations" found in the Handouts section of this issue of Communiqué. It is also available along with other adaptable presentations and handouts on the Communications Resources page at http://www.nasponline.org/communications/index.aspx. ∎