

Lab r Force Status	N	%	N	%
Employed	38,116	30.1	1,529	8.2
Not Employed or Seeking Work	59,365	46.2	2,119	14.6
Retired	27,485	60.2	8,116	17.8
	5,465		163	19.7
	131,350	44.5	36,024	12.9

### How Teachers Change: A Study of Professional Development in Adult Education

This is a summary of Smith, C., Hofer, J., et al. (2003). How teachers change: A study of professional development in adult education. NCSALL Reports #25. Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. <http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu/research/report25.pdf>

► **Research Question:** How do teachers change as a result of participation in one of three models of professional development (multi-session workshop, mentor teacher group, practitioner research group), and what are the factors (individual, professional development, program or system) that influence that change?

#### ► Methodology

The study population included 106 teachers of adult basic and literacy education in Maine, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. The majority were white and female; 67% were aged 41-60; 24% worked full time; 53% had no formal adult education training, and most had experience in K-12 teaching; half had attained higher than bachelor's degree level. Nearly one-quarter received no paid professional development (PD) time in the past year; and 73% received less than 3 days PD time during the year.

Of the 106 teachers, 100 attended one of the three types of PD for up to 18 hours and then completed questionnaires. The remaining six teachers in the overall sample served as the comparison group. There were two mentor teacher groups, two practitioner research groups, and one multi-session workshop in each of the three states. A subset of 18 teachers (6 from each model) was interviewed before, immediately after, and one year after the activity. Of the 100 who participated in PD, 16 completed fewer than 12 hours and were considered dropouts.

*Multi-session workshops* were held in 3 full-day sessions over a 1- to 3-month span and were conducted by a former adult education teacher, who was also a qualified trainer/professional developer. The workshop leader facilitated learning through activities and discussion on the topic. The *mentor teacher groups* met in four 2- to 3-hour sessions, plus two individual 4-hour mentor observation sessions, over 4 to 6 months. Participants learned about the process of peer coaching and received feedback from observations by their

mentors. The group leaders were current adult education teachers who both facilitated group learning and also individually mentored or coached each participant. The *practitioner research groups* participated in six 3-hour group sessions over a 6- to 9-month span. In these sessions, participants learned basic principles of research, and they conducted and helped one another conduct research. Previous or current teachers with experience in professional development and practitioner research facilitated the groups, guiding participants through the research process and helping them learn from their own and each other's research.

The questionnaires and interviews were designed to measure the overall amount of change and the type of change. Change was defined as differences in thinking or acting either on the topic (in terms of increased knowledge or action to address persistence in the classroom, program, or broader field) or off the topic (in terms of increased awareness of the field, teaching confidence, less isolation, use of a new teaching technique).

#### ► Results

Sixteen out of the original 100 participants left the professional development activity before completing two thirds (12 hours) of the required 18 hours. Most teachers (90% of the whole sample, 95% of completers, and even dropouts--teachers who attended for fewer than 12 of the 18 scheduled hours) changed at least minimally through gains in knowledge or actions in their classrooms; relatively few experienced no change at all. For many, change consisted of acquiring only one or two concepts. The majority (78% of the whole sample, 87% of completers) took some action, on or off the topic, but, for many, the change was minimal or short-lived (e.g., they called absent learners a few times or tried an observed technique once in their class). Changes were most often seen in teachers' roles as classroom teachers (rather than their roles as learners, program members, or members of the field). The research identified four types of change: (1) no to minimal change, (2) thinking change (more change in knowledge than in action), (3) acting change (more change in action than in knowledge), and (4) integrated change (new knowledge and action were used together, or "integrated"). Of teachers completing the professional development (n=83), 24% demonstrated integrated change, 13% demonstrated acting change, 35% demonstrated thinking change, and 28% demonstrated no or minimal change.

## ► Findings

Multiple factors interact to influence teacher change as a result of participating in professional development. Teachers who gained the most from the NCSALL professional development were those who

- Had strong motivation to learn about the topic or about theories of good teaching and wanted to integrate new learning with their actions;
- Began their teaching in the field of adult education, had fewer years of experience in the field, and did not have a post-graduate degree;
- Participated in high-quality professional development (as rated by the researchers) for more hours, and perceived it to be of high quality;
- Worked in programs where they had a voice in decision-making and where strategies suggested in the professional development had not yet been implemented; or
- Received benefits as part of their adult education jobs and had access to preparation time.

To a lesser extent, teachers tended toward greater change when they

- Were not required to use a particular curriculum;
- Worked more hours in adult education than others in the study;
- Had more paid professional development release time;
- Expressed a weaker level of commitment to staying in the field of adult education;
- Participated in professional development groups in which all participants were from the same program; and
- Had access to opportunities to share ideas with colleagues during and after participating in the professional development.

The model of professional development was not one of the most important factors, although there were different patterns of change related to each model.

## ► Implications

Professional development is necessary but not sufficient by itself to help teachers learn about and adopt new practices that promise to improve the quality of service. In an era of accountability that stresses improved student outcomes, policymakers at the federal, state, and program level will need to understand and address these factors.

The results of this study can inform the work of teachers, program directors, policymakers, and professional development personnel.

### *For Teachers:*

- Expect high-quality professional development.
- Recognize the need to develop a philosophy and theory of good teaching and student success.
- Work with other colleagues to improve working conditions.
- Advocate for paid preparation time, professional development release time, and benefits as part of the job.
- Work to increase opportunities for collegiality and teacher decision-making in your program.

### *For Program Directors and Policymakers:*

- Improve teachers' working conditions, including access to decision-making in the program, and create well-supported jobs for teachers.
- Provide access to professional development.
- Pay teachers to attend professional development.
- Increase access to colleagues and directors during and after professional development.
- Establish expectations at the state and program level that all teachers must continue to learn.

### *For Professional Developers:*

- Ensure that professional development is of high quality in terms of group dynamics, facilitation, and design.
- Offer a variety of professional development models for teachers to attend, including program-based professional development.
- Help teachers acquire skills to build theories of good teaching and student success.
- Add activities to each professional development session to help teachers strategize how to deal with the forces that affect their ability to take action.
- Work to increase opportunities for teacher collegiality and decision-making within their programs.
- Advocate for paid preparation time, professional development release time, and benefits as part of adult education jobs.
- Provide clear information during recruitment for professional development activities so that participants will know what to expect.

### *About the Authors*

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