

Section 2:

Professional Development Approaches

Overview

In this section of the *Guide*, four approaches to professional development that are especially applicable to adult education are discussed as follows:

- **Workshop/Presentation** fosters acquisition of new skills and knowledge about a topic through direct instruction and participatory activities.
- **Observation/Feedback** provides practitioners with data and feedback regarding their performance.
- **Inquiry/Research** requires practitioners to reflect upon their daily practices in a systematic, intentional manner, over time.
- **Product/Program Development** engages practitioners in such processes as curriculum development, program enhancement, and program improvement.

As adult educators plan for professional development, it is important to consider all of the above approaches. There is no single best approach to professional development. Rather, it is preferable for multiple approaches to be integrated with one another and address the complex and dynamic characteristics of specific program contents and learner needs. Success rests on finding the optimal combination of approaches for different situations. Often, **Workshops/Presentations** may be a first step in the professional development process, particularly if the purpose is to raise awareness among participants regarding new ideas or strategies. A workshop may be a vehicle for introducing practitioners to other approaches to professional development, or it may be a jumping off point for refining skills or for further exploring other concepts. Practitioners may, for instance, want to practice a new skill introduced in the workshop and choose to follow up with the **Observation/ Feedback** approach. Or, practitioners may wish to explore a new concept introduced in the workshop through the **Inquiry/Research** approach. Likewise, workshops or conferences may be held to discuss needs assessments and to collaboratively plan program-or product-development activities.

Although several approaches may be used in consort, each approach is discussed discreetly, as a means of studying the characteristics, requirements, and issues particular to each approach. Integrating all of the approaches into a professional development system, gives practitioners the option of selecting the experience they believe most suitable to the learning styles and skills they want to develop. Exhibit 2-1 presents a comparative overview of the approaches.

The remainder of this section contains detailed descriptions of the four approaches, including their underlying assumptions, and a review of the theory and research upon which they are based. Two aspects common to the four approaches are reflective practice and evaluation. Both are discussed in this overview rather than being repeated under each approach. Evaluation of professional development approaches is further detailed in Section 4 of the *Guide*. As discussed in Appendix A, the selection of a particular approach depends upon individual learners' needs, the learning environment, administrative mandates, and a sense of trust among practitioners. Most approaches may be attempted individually or collegially.

Reflective Practice

Underlying each of the four professional development approaches is a goal of developing the instructor as a reflective practitioner capable of monitoring and evaluating approaches to his or her work. Activities include making observations, synthesizing data, formulating preliminary hypotheses, analyzing hypotheses, and refining approaches.

Although reflective practice always has been part of effective instruction, over time there has been an increased emphasis on reflection in a systematic, intentional manner. One of the first professional development activities to encourage reflective practice was the use of case studies, whether real or imaginary. Very often, case studies are used in the **Workshop/Presentation** approach to encourage instructors to think through a situation and to develop alternative solutions to the problem posed in the case studies.

Another approach to reflective practice is the actual observation of instruction (i.e., by video or by class visits); and then collegially reflecting on ways either to improve the practice observed or to select alternative instructional strategies. This is a key component of the **Observation/Feedback** approach, and can be effective in **Workshop/Presentations** through the use of demonstration videos.

Comparative Overview of Professional Development Approaches

Approach	Underlying Assumptions	Theory and Background	Implementation	Results	Issues
Workshop/ Presentation	<p><u>Practitioners:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Benefit by learning proven behaviors and techniques; and • Change their behavior and learn new behavior not in their present repertoire. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing theory is essential but not sufficient to bring about change. Also need: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Demonstration/ modeling, – Practice, – Feedback, and – Coaching or other – Approach. • Change requires time. Only “awareness” can be gained in a single training session. 	<p>Usually the responsibility of a professional development coordinator and involves the following steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a needs assessment; 2. Plan the workshop/ presentation session(s); 3. Conduct workshops incorporating elements of effective professional development (see previous column); 4. Evaluate results (both short- and long-term). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Well-documented in K-12 arena; • When all elements in place, see significant gains in knowledge, skills, and transfer of learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While often the easiest and most inexpensive approach, especially for large numbers of staff, adequate time frequently not provided for conducting needs assessment, planning and implementing workshops / presentations; • Appears most effective for learning discreet skills; • When coaching involved, there are logistical and funding problems for adult education; but without this element, gains are minimal.
Observation/ Feedback	<p><u>Practitioners:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance ability to reflect upon own practices through observation of others; • Enhance growth through reflection and analysis of instructional practices; and • Continue to improve when they see positive results from their efforts to change. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounded in literature on teacher evaluation, clinical supervision, cognitive processes, and peer coaching; • Alternating focused and unfocused observations; and • Applicable to practitioners at different levels of cognition. 	<p>Two major processes: observation and feedback. Four steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct a pre-observation conference, 2. Observe instruction, 3. Analyze data, and 4. Conduct post-observation conference. <p>Each step has guidelines for successful implementation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Observation/Feedback approach successful in a small number of studies; and • Anecdotal information cites benefits, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Improved self-analysis, – Professional skill, – Increased collaboration, – Improved teaching – Performance, and – Increased student – Growth. 	

Comparative Overview of Professional Development Approaches (Continued)

Approach	Underlying Assumptions	Theory and Background	Implementation	Results	Issues
Inquiry/ Research	<p><u>Practitioners:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can control own professional practices; • Have legitimate expertise and experience; • Will search for answers to important questions and reflect on that data; and • Can see theory as informing practice and vice versa. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounded in reflective practice; • Describes relationship between inquiry and critical thought; • Relates theory to practice; and • Builds knowledge for teaching from the inside-out. 	<p>Methods most often qualitative and self-directed. Cycle of inquiry based on 8 steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify problem, issue, question, 2. Explore data collection methods, 3. Implement data collection, 4. Analyze data, 5. Plan action, 6. Implement action, 7. Monitor and evaluate, and 8. Share results. 	<p>Benefits for practitioners, mostly anecdotal, include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn research process, • Become more critical users of information, • Contribute to the knowledge base, • Become more informed decisionmakers, and • Instruction improves. • Promotes collegial interaction. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Requires time and staff readiness; • May be difficult for part-time adult educators to fit in schedules; • Need research skills; • Requires support (financial and administrative); and • Based on staff procedures.
Product/Program Development	<p><u>Practitioners:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learn best when they have a need to know or problem to solve; • Understand best what is needed to improve their practice; and • Acquire important attitudes and skills through participation in school improvement or curriculum development activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grounded in literature on "change"; • Most frequently used in K-12; • Helps improve group dynamics and ability to think; • Five-stage models include: readiness, planning, training, implementation, & maintenance (others include evaluation). 	<p>Often developed as a result of directives, funding, research data, or problems. Steps include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify need or problem, 2. Develop an action plan. 3. Implement plan, 4. Assess/evaluate results. <p>Professional development coordinator may serve as facilitator. Above four steps should be ongoing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some K-12 data show student gains (reading); • Little research on impact on adult programs; and • Often a "product" results. (Some studies have assessed satisfaction with product.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to identify situational conditions (i.e., administrative commitment, funding, time, resources, and flexibility.) • Adult education's part-time nature creates problems for widespread instructor participation; • Commitment from practitioners (often without collegiality or benefits) presents problem for adult education; and • Criteria for success include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Dispersed power, – Stress on professional development, – Broad dissemination, – Involved leadership, – Well-defined goals and "vision", – Accomplishments, and rewarded at all levels.

Product/Program Development stimulates reflection, as practitioners identify needs and produce action plans to develop a new curriculum or to engage in a program improvement process. These activities, accomplished in a collegial manner, require practitioners to reflect upon ways to improve the current program or to make changes to accomplish desired or required goals.

A key to reflective practice in **Inquiry/Research** is the systematic nature of reflection, itself. As defined by Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1990), systematic refers to: (1) ordered ways of gathering and recording information, documenting experiences, and producing a written record; and (2) ordered ways of recollecting, rethinking, and analyzing classroom events. Some of the ways to accomplish systematic reflection involve instructor journals, essays, or oral inquiry — which include conversation, description, and documentation.

Evaluation of Approaches

For too long, evaluation of professional development has been ignored. While anecdotal and self-reported data discuss the effectiveness of various professional development approaches on practitioner behavior, little empirical evidence exists to support this finding. Although **Workshop/Presentation** is the exception to that rule, most of that evaluation data comes from the K-12 arena. For example, research by Joyce and Showers (1988) show that instructors make gains in their level of knowledge and skills, and transfer what they have learned to their own classroom environment when theory, demonstration, practice, feedback, and coaching are incorporated into workshops. Similar findings were reported by Wade in 1985; and other findings in the K-12 arena (Good and Grouws, 1987) show evidence that participation in sequential workshops result in improved presentations as well as improved student performance.

More research must be conducted in adult education to determine the impact of these professional development approaches (singularly or in combination) on practitioner behavior and student performance. Currently, we do not have answers to such questions as: “How effective is **Product/Program Development** as a means of professional development for beginning instructors?” “What are the characteristics of instructors who are most likely to benefit from an **Inquiry/Research** approach and under what circumstances will the process flourish?” “What are the changes in teacher and/or student behavior as a result of the development of a new product” (e.g., curriculum)?

The relationship between student learning and professional development of the instructor is particularly elusive in adult education, because of the part-time nature and high turnover rates of both students and teachers. However, the studies by Lytle and her colleagues at the University of

Pennsylvania, the work of Fingeret and Pates at Literacy South, the work of CWELL in San Diego, and of the Action Research Project at CASAS have been assembling qualitative data about the effects of Inquiry/Research on teachers (and, to some extent, on students). Nonetheless, additional studies and documentation are needed, given today's emphasis on accountability.

Despite the lack of documentation in the literature, a widespread belief exists that there is a strong correlation between professional development and high-quality instructional programs. Professional growth, itself, can be accomplished through a variety of experiences, as described in the following section.

References

- Cochran-Smith, M. and Lytle, S.L. (1990). "Research on Teaching and Teacher Research: The Issues That Divide." *Educational Researcher*, 19(2), 2-11.
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- Wade, R. (1985). "What Makes a Difference in Inservice Teacher Education? A Meta-Analysis of Research." *Educational Leadership*, 42(4), 48-54.