

Section 1: Introduction

Professional development is a term conveying the concept that practitioners are (or should be) active partners in determining their own learning needs and in designing and implementing appropriate learning activities. After being used almost exclusively by professors, doctors, attorneys, and the like in describing continuing education requirements for advance certificates or recertification, professional development is a concept slowly working its way into the education arena. The importance of professional development in education, was recognized by the National Education Goals Panel in its statement of Goal 4 (see box), and is especially suitable for the adult education field — which has long-recognized that the practitioner's sense of ownership in his or her own professional growth is a key element in producing long-term effects on instructional behavior (Jones & Mosier, 1987; Loucks-Horsley et al., 1987; Pelavin Associates, Inc., et al., 1993).

This *Professional Development Resource Guide for Adult Educators*, supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL), seeks to promote ongoing professional development activities suitable for traditional adult education instruction, as well as basic skills instruction in other learning environments by (a) **broadening** the base of professional development approaches, (b) **enhancing** individual choice of appropriate approaches, and (c) **promoting** instruction that is effective and accountable. It is designed to be used primarily by professional development coordinators or specialists, but will also benefit state and local administrators involved with professional development, as well as individual instructors.

National Education Goal 4:

The Nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills, and they will have the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.

The *Guide* is one component of a three-year project, *Building Professional Development Partnerships with Adult Educators (PRO-NET)* which promotes professional development for adult educators through such activities as:

- professional development conferences,
- an on-line action research component,
- an electronic information system,
- digests describing professional development activities in the field, and
- technical assistance to programs.

PRO-NET is based on findings from a previous DAEL-supported project, the *Study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches*, which identified key elements of effective adult education professional development programs and which produced a set of instructional packets for professional development coordinators to help them train teachers and volunteer instructors in 10 skill and content areas (see Appendix C).

In addition to these two projects, the Federal government supports and promotes professional development activities for adult educators in many different ways. The Adult Education Act includes a setaside for teacher training and special projects, which currently reserves at least 10 percent of each state's basic grant for professional development. Staff development became one of the model indicators of program quality developed in response to the National Literacy Act of 1992 (NLA) and is to be considered when states evaluate their programs. The NLA also authorized the establishment of State Literacy Resource Centers (SLRC) with responsibility for supporting professional development activities. Another major Federal effort in this area has been the National Institute for Literacy's six inter-agency professional development capacity building grants to SLRCs. Also, the National Center on Adult Literacy, located at the University of Pennsylvania, has conducted research projects related to professional development.

<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches</i> Instructional Packets:</p> <p>The Adult Learner, Planning for Instruction, Team Learning, Monitoring Student Progress, Volunteers and Teachers in the Classroom, Communicative ESL Teaching, Mathematics: Strategic Problem Solving, Whole Language Approach, Improving Thinking Skills for Adult Learners, Learning Disabilities: Learner-Centered Approaches</p>

In this section of the *Guide*, we offer a brief overview of what is meant by professional development for adult educators, including the underlying principles upon which professional development should be based and the different professional development approaches to be presented. The section concludes with a description of the *Guide's* organization and content.

Professional Development for Adult Educators: An Overview

Improving the quality of instructional services delivered to adult learners, and ultimately enhancing learner outcomes, is especially important in light of concerns about the impact adult education services have on learning gains. Findings from the National Adult Literacy Survey revealed that nearly half of all American adults read and write at the two lowest levels of English literacy.

A dedicated staff, committed to improving the quality and effectiveness of adult education services is an essential requirement for improving learner outcomes and can occur only when instructors and other staff actively participate in developing and implementing program improvement initiatives. Such participation requires an investment in professional development in order to (a) acquaint staff with administrative concerns and suggestions, (b) identify staff needs and recommendations for improvement, and (c) implement strategies for improving services.

A highly skilled professional staff, knowledgeable about adult learners and competent in instructional approaches is a key ingredient in raising the literacy levels of adults.

When developing professional development opportunities for adult educators, whether as a professional development coordinator, state or local program administrator, or instructor, it is important to keep in mind the following points:

- Professional development has multiple beneficiaries, including instructors, administrators, programs, and, ultimately, adult learners.
- All professional development activities should be developed as part of a comprehensive plan.
- There is no single best approach for providing professional development, and adult educators should be able to choose from various approaches.
- There should be a balance between instructor-determined and program-determined professional development activities.
- Evaluation must be incorporated as an integral component of all professional development approaches.

Professional Development Has Multiple Beneficiaries

Adult education instructors and professional development coordinators benefit from professional development opportunities. Skilled adult education instructors, capable of adapting instructional strategies to different learning environments, will be able to branch out beyond the traditional adult education system and market their services to other human service delivery programs, such as job training, family literacy, and workplace literacy. Professional development coordinators, who possess the expertise to facilitate professional development suitable for different learning environments also will have new opportunities to market their services.

Investing in professional development benefits the adult education field in general, as staff acquire recognizable skills and accumulate knowledge necessary to meet the challenges presented by reforms sweeping across the national and state educational landscape. Implementing a comprehensive professional development system, however, is not a simple task. The nature of the adult education field, with its part-time service delivery system, underdeveloped infrastructure, and high staff turnover, present significant obstacles. Similarly, diminished resources and competing priorities present major challenges to administrators attempting to develop and to implement a professional development system. To respond to such challenges and to ensure effective experiences, administrators will have to be more innovative in providing professional development. Furthermore, in a climate of accountability, administrators will be responsible (now more than ever) for the outcomes of professional development activities, both in terms of its effect upon instructors' skills and behaviors, and, ultimately, on learner outcomes.

Professional Development Activities as Part of a Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive professional development plan should be developed and revised on a regular basis to meet the changing needs of the program and staff. All professional development activities offered should be part of such a plan. Changes in instructional behavior sought by professional development activities require more than a single opportunity for instructors to attend a workshop or to participate in an inquiry research project. A series of related professional development activities enables a) providers to meet the varying needs and learning styles of practitioners, b) instructors to participate in ongoing activities that reinforce their knowledge and skills, and c) administrators to track how the various professional development opportunities help them achieve program goals.

To enhance the likelihood of success, individual activities incorporated in such professional development plans should:

- be based on the stated needs of instructors and administrators,
- place learning in the context of theory,
- offer sequenced and follow-up professional development opportunities,
- model adult learning principles, and
- provide opportunities for reflection and networking by participants (*Study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches*, see Appendix C).

Professional development activities should also reflect the principles of high-quality professional development recently published by the U.S. Department of Education (see box).

The Mission and Principles of Professional Development

- ✧ Focuses on teachers as central to student learning, yet includes all other members of the school community
- ✧ Focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement
- ✧ Respects and nurtures the intellectual and leadership capacity of teachers, administrators, and others in school community
- ✧ Reflects best available research and practice in teaching, learning, and leadership
- ✧ Enables teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, uses of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards
- ✧ Promotes continuous inquiry and improvement embedded in the daily life of schools
- ✧ Is planned collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development
- ✧ Requires substantial time and other resources
- ✧ Is driven by a coherent long-term plan
- ✧ Is evaluated ultimately on the basis of its impact on teacher effectiveness and student learning; and this assessment guide's subsequent professional development efforts.

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Multiple Professional Development Approaches

There is no single best professional development approach. As detailed in Section 2, selecting a particular approach should depend upon the instructor's learning needs, the learning environments,

and program requirements and administrative mandates. A comprehensive professional development plan offers adult educators a choice among various approaches. In this *Guide*, the following four approaches, some which have not frequently been used in adult education, are presented:

- **Workshop/Presentation:** the acquisition of new skills and knowledge through participation in singular or sequential workshops, conferences, seminars, and summer institutes.
- **Observation/Feedback:** mentoring, peer coaching, and supervision that provides practitioners with data and feedback regarding their performance.
- **Inquiry/Research:** practitioners reflect upon a question specific to their daily practices in a systematic, intentional manner, over time. This approach involves many different types of practitioner-led activities, including study circles, action research, case studies, and curriculum writing.
- **Product/Program Development:** practitioners, generally in a collegial manner, participate in such processes as curriculum development and program design or redesign, to enhance program quality.

It is important to note that these approaches are not mutually exclusive, and in terms of application, some approaches have several steps in common. Both Inquiry/Research and Product/Program development begin, for instance, with the identification of a *need* or a *problem*. Several approaches lend themselves to collaborative efforts. Observation/Feedback and Product/Program development are collegial activities, while the Inquiry/Research approach can be conducted individually or collaboratively. Several approaches involve job-embedded learning, requiring practitioners to accumulate and build upon their knowledge about the teaching/learning process (by exploring issues and concerns in their own working environments). The Workshop/Presentation approach may be the vehicle for introducing practitioners to the other approaches, or it may be the first step in professional development for refining skills or for exploring concepts.

The roles of professional development coordinators expand as different approaches are employed. They may serve not only as instructional trainers but as consultants, planners, and facilitators; and they may be called upon to facilitate discussions among practitioners collaborating in an inquiry/research project, or to assist administrators and practitioners in developing a strategic plan for professional development. As their roles change, it is also important to think about the types of professional development the coordinators themselves require.

Finding a Balance Between Self-Determined and Program-Determined Professional Development Opportunities

A comprehensive professional development plan includes opportunities for self-determined and program-determined activities. Self-determined professional development is based upon the premise that adults *desire* to be the origin of their own learning, and require some control over the “what, who, how, why, when, and where” of their learning experience. In short, practitioners select topics and approaches to professional development that are best suited to their individual learning needs and preferences.

Program development has a more organizational dimension and is generally targeted to improving instructional services, correcting a program deficiency or implementing a mandated program change. Such program development activities may be broad, thus having an impact upon the whole system (e.g., adopting a competency-based approach, restructuring the adult education system to incorporate other types of services such as family or workplace literacy programs, and developing and implementing a new curriculum), or it may be more administrative (e.g., developing new reporting forms). Consequently, professional development, activities to support these changes may be mandated or at least strongly supported by state or local administrative forces.

Although administratively mandated professional development is not congruent with the concept that educators take charge of their own professional development needs, an effective professional development system creates a balance between the two types of opportunities. Balancing self-determined professional development and professional development for program enhancement raises the following, important questions:

- If self-determined professional development is the driving philosophy, how are individual needs and learning preferences balanced with organizational goals?
- If the program goal is to improve program services, must all professional development be mandated, to ensure that instructional staff have the same requisite skills and knowledge to support the changes mandated by program-enhancement efforts?
- Where do individual needs and personal preferences come into play in program enhancement efforts?
- How is a *vision* for professional development generated (i.e., a vision that incorporates organizational goals and self-determined needs and learning activities)?

The literature on change offers some solutions to the issues just raised. For instance, Wood's (1981) approach to K-12 school improvement through professional development, known as

“Readiness, Planning, Training, Implementation and Maintenance” involves a collegial approach to identifying school enhancement efforts and to planning and implementing professional development activities to support the desired goals. According to Wood's model, providing professional development during all phases of the program enhancement process — *bringing staff into the identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation phases* — increases the chances for successfully implementing the change. This collegial approach, which is equally applicable to the adult education system, (a) fosters a greater sense of ownership in the change process, (b) reflects practitioners own needs, and (c) fosters a greater willingness among professionals to implement change.

Adult education programs often employ a collegial approach to determine program goals and professional development activities. Two such examples, the Literacy Training Network in Minnesota and the System for Adult Basic Education Support in Massachusetts, are briefly described in the box below.

Collegial Approaches to Adult Education Professional Development and Program Enhancement

The Literacy Training Network (LTN), established in 1979, is designed to assist the Minnesota Department of Education train adult basic education staff in implementing effective learner-centered adult education practices. LTN participants, including adult education teachers, lead teachers, administrators, and members of agencies providing or promoting adult literacy services from all areas of the state work collaboratively to:

- ◇ Address the special training needs of adult education staff;
- ◇ Promote cooperation and coordination among ABE and other resources and services needed by adult learners;
- ◇ Recognize and strengthen adult education teachers as professionals; and
- ◇ Improve program development and service delivery.

The System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES), established in 1990 by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to provide services that would improve the quality of adult basic education programs in the state, was conceptualized by adult education teachers, counselors, and administrators and staff from the State Bureau of Adult Education. Among SABES' support functions are professional development, program development, a statewide clearinghouse, and a research and design component. An Advisory Group consists of local program directors and staff who meet several times per year to discuss professional development and program development needs and to assist in overall policy and direction of SABES.

Evaluation as an Integral Component of Professional Development Activities

Professional development is successful when there is a transfer of knowledge and a change in instructional behavior. Simply participating in a certain number of professional development activities or completing a required number of professional development hours does not ensure that new skills and concepts have been mastered or will be used. Therefore, a critical component of professional development involves ongoing and systematic evaluation procedures that focus on measuring such changes. Yet, as often noted by the *Study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches*, evaluation is consistently identified as both a critical component and a weak link in the delivery of professional development opportunities (Tibbetts, et al., 1991; Leahy, 1986; Potish, 1985; Cranney, 1983).

Most evaluations of professional development have measured the "happiness quotient," that is: what did the participant like most and least, rather than identifying changes in instructional practices. With concerns about program accountability, the likely elimination of a Federal setaside for professional development, and decreased funding levels, it is especially important to document the effectiveness of professional development activities. Among the questions that need to be answered are: How did practitioners benefit from the professional development activity? What did they learn and

how was the information applied in the instructional setting? Did the professional development activity result in changed instructional behavior and, ultimately, in improved student performance. Section 4 of the *Guide* discusses approaches to evaluating professional development activities.

Organization and Content of the Guide

This *Guide* is essentially concerned with broadening the base of professional development approaches, enhancing individual choice regarding appropriate approaches, and promoting instruction (based on the principles of adult learning) that is effective and accountable.

The *Guide* is designed to be suggestive, rather than directive. Readers are encouraged to adopt, as well as adapt the contents presented here to fit the context and needs of their programs and participants. Although primarily for professional development coordinators, the *Guide* also targets individual instructors and state and local administrators. The four additional major sections of the Guide are outlined below:

Section 2, “Approaches to Professional Development,” presents four approaches to professional development and organizes each discussion under the following headings:

- **Introduction** — briefly describes the approach.
- **Underlying Assumptions**— provides the rationale for the approach.
- **Theory and Background**— briefly discusses the research literature and how the approach has been implemented.
- **Implementation**— describes the steps for implementing the approach.
- **Results**— discusses the outcomes of the professional development activities primarily from an anecdotal perspective.
- **Issues**— discusses concerns that should be considered before selecting the approach.

Section 3, “Users of the Guide: Three Strands,” presents detailed suggestions for using the *Guide*. It is divided into three subsections for three different audiences:

- Professional Development Coordinators — individuals in a program or agency responsible for planning and implementing professional development activities;
- Instructors; and
- State and Local Administrators.

Included in each subsection is the use of needs assessment profiles and how such profiles can be utilized to design professional development plans. (Needs assessment profile forms are located in

Appendix A.) Also included in the subsections for Professional Development Coordinators and for Instructors are hands-on activities to help participants in selecting the best “approaches” from Section 2, to meet the needs of their own learning environments.

Section 4, “Evaluating Professional Development,” presents a specific and practical approach for evaluating professional development activities and using information on an ongoing basis to improve professional development services. The section presents an evaluation model appropriate for all professional development approaches and emphasizes evaluation as a continuing process rather than a single event.

Section 5, “Appendices,” includes resources helpful to planning, implementing, and evaluating professional development, as follows:

- **Appendix A** presents *sample* Needs Assessment Profiles for Professional Development Coordinators, Instructors, and State and Local Administrators. These forms, which may be used as presented or adapted for local use, serve both as needs assessment instruments and resulting profiles. From the profiles, *Professional Development Plans* (PDPs) can be designed for educators. (These forms are somewhat parallel to Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) used for students).
- **Appendix B** includes several sample individual professional development plans that programs often use. Such plans, whether in the form of formal or informal agreements, generally include: the individual's learning goal(s), methods and activities to accomplish the goal(s), resources required, and plans for evaluating learning outcomes.
- **Appendix C** includes a description of the 10 instructional packets developed under the *Study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches* and the underlying principles upon which they were developed, and information about the availability of each packet.
- **Appendix D** includes possible solutions to scenarios used in Section 3 of the *Guide*.
- **Appendix E** includes articles relating to the professional development approaches.

Readers of the *Guide* may “enter” the *Guide* at any point, as it is not organized to be read sequentially. The Table of Contents, of course, may be used to help the reader choose the most appropriate section(s), (e.g., administrators may choose first to look at the administrative strand of the Users of the *Guide* section). If more in-depth information is required regarding specific professional development approaches, the reader may turn to Section 2; and references are provided throughout this *Guide* to direct the reader's attention to other sections.

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