

Section 3: Professional Development ---

The Issues You Face

As a program administrator, you know that:

- ◆ Teachers are the key to helping students achieve level gains and reach the other job-related, life-related, and education-related goals for which your program is accountable.
- ◆ Many of your teachers come to work in your program with a K–12 teaching perspective and lack formal training in teaching adults.
- ◆ The turnover rate for adult education teachers is high, and some teachers' primary commitment is not to teaching in adult education.
- ◆ When you have part-time teachers teaching in multiple sites at various times of the week and day, teachers can become isolated, and it is hard to find ways to bring them together to learn from one another.

The NCSALL Professional Development Study has information about how teachers change and about their concerns and characteristics that may help you deal with these challenges.

The Professional Development Study

Findings from Research

ABE teachers have limited formal preparation geared specifically to teaching adults, and have limited opportunities for professional development and continued learning. There are three avenues for teachers to learn: (1) on their own through self-study, from teaching students, or from their own experience; (2) informally from colleagues (inside and outside of the program) and administrators; and (3) formally through professional development activities or coursework. Isolation, part-time job structure, and limited opportunities for professional development may require teachers to rely more on learning from self-study or from their own experience, a difficult proposition for those teachers who do not have the time or sufficient training to study on their own.

ABE teachers do not follow clear career paths into the field, work under less than optimal conditions, and a significant portion do not stay in the field for long. They lack many of the supports that would help them do the best job possible. Teachers are strongly affected by their working conditions and respond to them by: coping with the situation; challenging and trying to improve the situation; or leaving their job, and possibly the field, altogether. The main reasons teachers gave for why they would leave their ABE job were low salary, lack of benefits, limited working hours, and, to a lesser extent, lack of job security. Although teachers reported a fairly strong desire to stay in the field, they were less likely to want to work in the field five years from now (as opposed to one year from now), and even less certain they viewed work in the ABE field as their long-term career.

Teachers face unique challenges in their teaching because of the policies and structure of the ABE field, and how they approach these challenges is influenced by both program and individual factors. Specifically, teachers in adult basic education are faced with three challenges: (1) organizing instruction, (2) assessing student progress, and (3) developing curriculum. Programs'

About the Professional Development Study

A team of researchers, led by Cristine Smith and Judy Hofer, investigated how adult education teachers changed after participating in one of three different models of professional development (multisession workshop, mentor teacher group, or practitioner research group), all on the same topic of learner persistence. The study also investigated the most important individual, professional development, program, and system factors that influenced the type and amount of teacher change. This study was conducted primarily to help professional development decision makers plan and deliver effective professional development, and to understand the factors that influence how teachers change as a result of professional development.

- 100 teachers from three New England states participated in up to 18 hours of professional development in one of three professional development models.
- Researchers collected data from these teachers in three "waves" between July 1998–June 2000—Wave 1: before the professional development began; Wave 2: just after the professional development ended; Wave 3: one year after completion of the professional development.
- Researchers collected information about teachers' backgrounds; their program/teaching situation; amount and type of other professional development before, during, and after the NCSALL Professional Development in which they participated; their views about teaching; and their experiences as a learner, a teacher, a program member, and a member of the field.
- From the 100 teachers, 18 were randomly selected to serve as a subsample, providing additional data via interviews at the same three points in time. Researchers observed them once in their classrooms, and interviewed their program directors once.

beliefs about the purpose of ABE instruction, their curriculum development and assessment practices, and their policies on enrollment shape teachers' approach. Teachers' own knowledge and skills in curriculum development, their beliefs about the appropriate role for ABE teachers, and their beliefs about the purpose of ABE instruction also strongly affect how they approach these challenges.

Programs in ABE vary considerably from one another in facilities and resources, and in policies and structure. Limited resources and policies imposed by external forces affect the programs' ability to provide the types of services to students that they would like to provide.

ABE teachers typically play a limited role in the broader field of ABE, (e.g., advocating for students' needs, providing professional development to other teachers), either because they are unaware of opportunities or they are not so inclined.

Most teachers, even those who dropped out of the professional development before finishing 18 hours, changed at least minimally through gains in knowledge or actions in their classrooms; relatively few experienced no change at all.

The research identified four types of change: (1) no to minimal change, (2) thinking change (changes in thinking were greater relative to changes in acting), (3) acting change (changes in acting were greater relative to changes in thinking), and (4) integrated change. The majority (72%) of the 83 teachers who completed the professional development demonstrated change, most of which was thinking or acting change. The teachers (24%) who fell into the "integrated change" type also demonstrated a higher overall amount of change. They showed more sustained change, and in more arenas (classroom, program, and field).

Multiple factors—individual, professional development, program and system factors—interact to influence teacher change as a result of participating in professional

The researchers also documented all the information teachers gave them about their jobs, working conditions, and challenges in teaching in adult basic education.

development. Overall, teachers who changed more after participating in professional development were those who:

- Worked more hours in adult education,
- Had well-supported jobs (good benefits, ample prep time, paid professional development release time),
- Had a voice in decision making in their programs,
- Had their first teaching experience in adult education,
- Were relatively new to the field,
- Had more access to colleagues,
- Did not have an advanced degree (above bachelor's), and
- Participated for more hours in high-quality professional development.

Teachers who changed more were teachers who worked in programs that:

- Gave teachers benefits, paid professional development release time, and prep time through their adult education job,
- Had not previously addressed student persistence and gave teachers a voice in decision making in the program,
- Had mechanisms for collegiality among teachers in the program,
- Gave teachers freedom to make changes to the curriculum used.

Specific Implications of the Professional Development Study

Implication: Provide or increase access to professional development for your teachers.

What the research says: Teachers changed more and in preferable ways based on the amount of professional development they attended, and teachers who received more annual hours of paid professional development attended for longer.

Therefore, you should ...

... provide every teacher with opportunities to participate in professional development, and you should pay them to attend.

Strategies

- ◆ **Redirect money from the program budget to pay for a substitute** so that teachers can attend staff development. Compensate teachers at their regular rate of pay for professional development time.
- ◆ **Offer professional development within the program** by organizing in-house professional development run by the teachers themselves. Set up staff meetings so that one is administrative in focus, the next is a formal professional development activity, and the next is informal time for teachers to share ideas and problems.
- ◆ **Make professional development a local activity** by reaching agreement with another program to cosponsor a study circle or workshop that teachers from both programs can attend.
- ◆ **Establish learning activities and mechanisms for teachers** in your program who are new to the field of adult basic education, regardless of whether they have taught in K–12. Ensure that every new teacher attends an orientation or general training offered by the state professional development system. Provide a thorough orientation to your own program. Assign new teachers a mentor who is a more experienced teacher, and ensure that every new teacher is observed (with feedback) within three months of teaching.
- ◆ **Get to know the state or regional professional development staff**, and let them know what needs for professional development you and your staff have. Encourage them to build in discussion time during professional development activities for teachers to talk about their work, not just learn more about a technique or strategy. Encourage them to establish networks of “like” teachers (by role, by experience level, by program type) who can meet periodically and informally outside of their programs to talk about their work, new research, and new strategies.

◆ **Contact your local university and ask them to design an online course** about adult education for your teachers; then, offer one scholarship a year to a teacher in your program to participate in this course. Contact other program administrators to ask them to do the same, and work with the state professional development system to negotiate the topic of the course to attract other teachers throughout the state.

◆ **Ask teachers to write a short summary, to share with other teachers, about the professional development they attended.** Teachers could share by making a poster, or providing materials on a bulletin board. Publish summaries in a program newsletter, or have the teachers share their summaries via e-mail. Ask your regional or state professional development and technical assistance center to provide an online discussion board for your teachers, or use one online for free. To make discussion central to the sharing experience, give them suggested guidelines regarding how to interact on a discussion board.

◆ **Ask teachers to develop an action plan** after each professional development activity in which they participate to help them implement the strategies they have learned.

Implication: Allow teachers to participate more in decision making.

What the research says: Teachers who had more say in the decisions at the program level were able to take more action after participating in professional development.

Therefore, you should ...

... provide opportunities and include mechanisms for teachers to have a say in decision making about improving the quality of services.

Strategies

◆ **Ask teachers how they would like to be involved in decision making,** and get their ideas regarding formal mechanisms for having input in decision making in the program.

◆ **Set up informal discussion times.** Try establishing a free, electronic discussion list for your program. Encourage an open flow of communication among staff; do not use it for information dissemination purposes only. Use this venue not only for teacher sharing, but as a formal mechanism for gathering teacher input and advice.

◆ **Send out periodic surveys in which teachers can voice concerns or share advice** about program improvement. Ask a teacher to summarize and analyze the survey results for the rest of the staff.

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Strategies *(continued)*

◆ **Provide opportunities for teachers to brainstorm together some solutions** to their concerns and have formal mechanisms in place for choosing a solution.

◆ **Close class for a night and meet with teachers to evaluate the program.** Then, incorporate changes based upon teachers' feedback, and later share the results of those changes. For example, once a quarter, have teachers compile a list of concerns, and rank them. Put a teacher in charge of collecting concerns. At the meeting, discuss the priority concern, and involve teachers in setting next steps. Involve two or three teachers in piloting changes, and collect program data to use in evaluating the changes. Involve teachers in analyzing the data, and reporting back to the staff. Make refinements, and integrate changes incrementally until they are made program-wide.

Implication: Set expectations that all teachers in the program should and must continue to learn through professional development.

What the research says: Teachers with more experience teaching in the adult education field and teachers with higher levels of formal education were less likely to change. Teachers typically have limited opportunities for professional development and continued learning.

Therefore, you should ...

... establish expectations at program level that all teachers should continue learning.

Strategies

◆ **During the hiring process, convey that continued learning is a requirement of the job and part of the culture of the program.** You can do this by adding questions such as "Tell me how you would like to continue your professional learning while being employed as a teacher in this program." You can also add statements such as "In this program, we believe that teachers, as professionals, are never done learning. Every teacher is expected to build his/her professional knowledge and skills, based on problems encountered in his or her teaching."

◆ **Create a comprehensive plan to prepare teachers to teach adults.** Require teachers to have an annual professional development plan that lists the problems they face and what knowledge/skills they want to acquire in order to address that problem. Review these plans periodically to ensure that every teacher is attending program-based, regional, or statewide professional development related to these problems and topics.

◆ **Set an example by demonstrating your own curiosity and participation in professional development.** Make and publicize or post your own annual professional development plan, based on problems you face in your job or program data indicating where you need to make

changes. Let teachers know that you will be attending professional development or other professional learning activities to address your needs. After returning from professional development, find ways to share what you learned with teachers: a short update in a staff meeting, posting a summary of what you learned in a newsletter, providing a workshop or seminar about what you learned. Let teachers know that you expect them to do the same, and that their time in doing so will be compensated.

◆ **Encourage teachers to learn how to be trainers.** Identify teachers who are using successful approaches, based on good student achievement or other program data. Ask these teachers to provide a seminar inside the program for other teachers, sharing what they know. Encourage these teachers to develop a conference presentation or study circle for teachers outside the program. Contact your professional development state or regional office to find out whether they would be interested in sponsoring your teacher(s) to present to other teachers in the region or state.

◆ **Develop mechanisms that ensure that teachers constantly think about the problems they face** in their teaching, and that they seek professional development based upon an identified problem, rather than based on professional development that seems convenient but on a topic about which they are not interested.

◆ **Tie professional development to program improvement goals.** Do strategic planning with your teachers to determine goals for the coming year. After the goals are set, have teachers identify the professional development they will need to address the goals.

◆ **Encourage teachers to be involved outside of the program, as members of the field.** Encourage them to join and interact with others on state and national adult education discussion lists, which are venues for ongoing, informal professional development. Encourage teachers to submit presentation proposals and send them to regional or state conferences. Subscribe to national publications, keeping teachers connected to and informed of current events in the field. Support them in taking part in formal teacher inquiry projects, action research, or other opportunities that help them build their capacity as leaders in the field. Talk to your professional development system staff about opportunities for your teachers to engage in research, to train other teachers, to join in advocacy or policy efforts, and/or to play a leadership role within the region or state.

Implication: Create well-supported jobs for teachers.

What the research says: Teachers who had well-supported jobs were in a better position to take actions that led to preferred change. Teachers' top concerns about their jobs relate to their program (structure and mission, facilities, and administration) and their job (salary, benefits, and number of working hours).

Therefore, you should ...

... implement a plan for improving teachers' working conditions.

Strategies

- ◆ **Seek local support/fundraising by establishing a literacy council or coalition.** A literacy council is a committee of local citizens who are interested in supporting adult basic education in their community. Like a board of directors, they can initiate activities to raise funds for the program, and these funds can be used to support teachers. Establish a stakeholder advocacy group inclusive of business and industry and student organizations to lobby for more dollars. Enlist the leadership of professionals who are not tied to federal dollars (retired teachers or program administrators, independent consultants, other community stakeholders) to take a leadership role.
- ◆ **Partner with local businesses to provide adult education services,** asking that they provide support for the teacher's salary. Combine a few part-time teaching positions to create a job that has more working hours.
- ◆ **Obtain VISTA or Americorps volunteers,** who come with their own professional development monies. Provide VISTA volunteers with access to grant-writing training, and enlist their help in finding money to supplement your program and create better jobs for teachers.
- ◆ **Raise awareness about the needs of ABE teachers with the school system** (if you are school-based). Convince the state K–12 teacher's union to accept ABE teachers as members with full benefits. Share the successes and the barriers teachers in your programs face, and negotiate ways to help improve teachers' working situations. Collaborate with other program administrators within your local system. Address teacher working conditions by district, community, parish, or county. Enlist teachers in organizing and applying pressure from the field.
- ◆ **Seek community partners to provide better space for teachers.** Combine funding to get "economies of scale"; e.g., two programs could pool their resources to rent additional space that could be used by both programs as a teacher resource center.
- ◆ **Seek in-kind resources.** Approach local businesses, such as photocopy stores, office-supply stores, and local discount stores, to see if they will contribute supplies/materials or certificates for free supplies.
- ◆ **Advocate for teachers to have their own classrooms.** If the space must be shared with another teacher (K–12), advocate that the ABE teacher has equal access to the classroom blackboard, materials and supplies, and storage space.

Implication: Increase opportunities for teachers to interact (share ideas) and participate together in professional development.

What the research says: Teachers who participated in staff development with other teachers from their program changed more, and teachers in programs who had more access to colleagues during and after the professional development changed more.

Therefore, you should ...

... increase every teacher's access to their colleagues and to you, the administrator.

Strategies

In programs with more than one teacher or class:

- ◆ **Combine two classes**, so that one teacher teaches both classes, while one teacher goes to observe another teacher. Suggest that a beginning and an experienced teacher pair up to observe each other's classes.
- ◆ **Set up times for you to observe** (*not* evaluate) teachers' classes. Then discuss your observations with the teacher.⁸
- ◆ **Offer to substitute in a teacher's class while that teacher observes you**; then discuss the class afterwards, being sure to use a pre-observation/post-observation protocol.
- ◆ **Encourage short-term team teaching** among teachers who have recently completed a professional development activity together. Using suggestions above about how to free teachers up from their classes, ask teachers to coteach one of their classes, trying out a new strategy, technique, or approach they learned in the professional development.
- ◆ **Ask teachers to demonstrate a new strategy to others at a staff meeting.** Set up a resource room where one of the teacher's strategies are highlighted each month, complete with lesson plans. Publish a "lesson plan of the month" in the program newsletter, or provide a handout at a staff meeting.

In programs with just one teacher:

- ◆ **Help the teacher establish contact with another teacher in the nearest ABE program.** Provide times for the teacher to call or otherwise communicate with area ABE teachers, and encourage the teacher to do so.

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⁸ For an example of observation protocols, see NCSALL's Mentor Teacher Guide (Adult Multiple Intelligences) Appendix B: Handouts and Articles on Classroom Observation, Peer Coaching and Mentoring: http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/mentor_b.pdf.

Strategies *(continued)*

- ◆ **Contact your regional or state professional development and technical assistance center** to find out if they have teacher networks, mentoring programs, or other individualized support mechanisms in which your teacher can participate.
- ◆ **Provide the teacher opportunities to visit other area programs.** Compensate him or her for time and travel. Encourage the teacher to open his or her classroom to other area teachers.
- ◆ **Encourage the teacher to network** and remain in contact with teachers he or she meets at professional development activities and events.

Additional Resources

To learn more about the Professional Development Study, go to: www.ncsall.net

NCSALL Professional Development Study:

- ◆ To read the full report, ***How Teachers Change: A Study of Professional Development in Adult Education***, go to: <http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/report25.pdf>
- ◆ To read the full report, ***The Characteristics and Concerns of Adult Basic Education Teachers***, go to: <http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/report26.pdf>
- ◆ To read a summary report of ***How Teachers Change***, go to: <http://www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/report25a.pdf>
- ◆ To download the *Focus on Basics* on staff development go to: <http://www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=150>