

Inviting Your Thoughts on a Comprehensive PD System



Submitted by mcorley on June 13, 2016 - 9:27pm

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Colleagues:

In August 2015, the National Council for Adult Learning (NCAL) hosted a Blog entitled *Moving PD Closer to the Top*. In this Blog, several adult education practitioners and researchers expressed thoughts and ideas concerning the creation of a more effective and comprehensive system of professional development (<http://ncalamerica.org/blog/moving-pd-closer-to-the-top>).

Then, in September 2015, Johan Uvin, Acting Assistant Secretary, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE), U.S. Department of Education, and Gail Spangenberg, President, National Council for Adult Learning (Board Chair), and Founder and Managing Director, Adult Learning Partners, co-authored the article, “*Throwing down the Gauntlet for PD.*” In this article, the authors ask us to “...rethink and restructure recruitment, training, and program staffing and benefits so that more of the current workforce is motivated to remain in the field and so that young professionals are inspired to enter Adult Education as a respected and fully professional career goal.” The article, which is posted at <http://sites.ed.gov/octae/2015/09/24/throwing-down-the-gauntlet-for-pd/>, sets six priorities for creating an effective PD system for adult education. The priorities are...

1. Consult with Those who Provide the Services
2. Define What Constitutes an Effective Adult Education Teacher
3. Identify and Adopt/Adapt Good Training Models and Approaches
4. Build PD Explicitly into Adult Education Planning
5. Improve Data Collection for PD

6. Develop Clearer Communications

In response to the challenges implicit in the six priorities listed above, the Association of Adult Literacy Professional Developers (AALPD) sponsored a pre-conference at the April 2016 COABE conference in Dallas, Texas. Attendees brainstormed ways to make each of the six priorities a reality, but this effort represents only a start. Many more voices need to ring in on the issues. Specifically, we need YOUR input.

The National Council for Adult Learning (NCAL) has established a new Blog, *Picking up the PD Challenge* (See <http://ncalamerica.org/blog>). With input from some of the AALPD pre-conference participants, the NCAL Blog provides summaries of key points related to each of the six priorities for PD. We invite you to read the summaries and contribute your own questions, comments, and suggestions. NCAL will synthesize the input from all contributors and publish a full paper. Please post your thoughts and recommendations to the Blog. Thank you!

-Mary Ann Corley (for AALPD and NCAL)

👤 Comments (10)



Leecy / June 18, 2016 - 12:54pm / 0 Likes

PD in Isolated Program Regions

Mary Anne, thanks for posting this information and the invitation to continue the discussion on <http://ncalamerica.org/blog>. Rather than post my comments there, I thought I would do so here to start since I don't want to dampen the enthusiasm on that blog! :)

I work closely with Adult Education programs in the vast, multicultural, rural Four Corners region in Colorado. I support the effort to make entry into Adult Ed more attractive to future pros, and I train teachers to work with adults. What so many of these discussion are missing, however, is the perspective from rural programs like the ones that I serve, which are not housed in colleges or school districts. They are non-profits that offer the only ABE and GED services to residents in their areas. Programs like these struggle just to keep doors open. They do not have access to a pool of qualified instructors in the region. They can only offer part-time positions, at very low pay, and only only during nine months of the year in most cases. When they are lucky, they can keep staff for awhile until people find better jobs with higher pay and benefits. Instructors in these programs often work several different jobs. Professional development is not something they can afford to support, and programs cannot afford to pay them for PD. When people are forced by the State to enroll in courses leading to certification, the resentment is, understandably, evident. Often, as soon as they complete one required course, they leave for better jobs, forcing programs to start all over again because the State requires that instructors either become certified or enrolled in courses leading to certification.

It is often evident to me that PD discussions often address the realities of big cities, where agencies can

collaborate and where programs can afford to interview a number of qualified candidates and make PD a part of the MOU. In the Four Corners region, that is not the case. Perhaps such programs need to close? That is where they are headed as the demands on them increase. Leecy



mcorley / June 20, 2016 - 12:03pm / 0 Likes

PD in Isolated Program Regions

Leecy:

Thanks for your thoughtful response. You raise some important issues—and ones, I believe, we all struggle with, albeit perhaps to a lesser degree in urban areas than in rural ones. First—let me say that our primary concern (for all of us) should be the quality of services provided to adult learners. We are aware of the critical importance of the teacher's knowledge and skills to student achievement. And we know that, whether in urban, suburban, or rural areas, adult ed teachers would benefit from professional learning that helps them refine their practice. When I was adult ed supervisor for Baltimore County Public Schools (1982-1988), we could afford only one professional development Saturday each semester, for which teachers received an extremely small stipend to attend. That PD was not enough to change teacher practice. But I do acknowledge that it was more than many rural programs could offer.

My big frustration at the time was that, just as in your example, many teachers who taught ABE or GED or ESL part-time often left after a few semesters to begin or to resume full-time careers elsewhere, so the teacher turnover rate was significant. As much as many of these teachers loved their work in adult ed, we couldn't offer them full-time work, benefits, or even appropriate compensation for their giving up a Saturday to attend professional development workshops. This high teacher turnover meant that PD experiences often had to start at Square 1 each semester, repeating basic info for new hires on adult learners' needs and ways to engage adult learners. This made it difficult to provide any continuity of professional development for the more seasoned teachers, although we did try our best to differentiate PD offerings.

I understand your concerns and acknowledge that they represent more of an issue in rural communities—but I think that we need to address the development of a comprehensive system of PD for adult ed teachers in whatever settings they work, and, in that process, we need to consider ways to bring PD opportunities to teachers in rural areas (via online work, for example). Critical to this is local programs' networking with social service agencies that often provide services to the same adults and collaboratively considering ways to provide incentives for teachers to attend or participate in PD offerings. I **know**—easier said than done!

Leecy—the way to achieve this is not readily apparent, and none of it is an easy fix, but I propose that we have to try to develop a more reliable system for helping adult learners meet with success. Thanks for your input. Would love to continue this dialogue...perhaps through such a dialogue some potential solutions will emerge...



Leecy / June 21, 2016 - 5:35pm / 0 Likes

PD in Isolated Program Regions

I feel heard, Mary Ann. Now I can just hope that funders will hear as well.

No doubts, distance ed needs to play a role. (Wish we could offer food with the sessions!)

In this region, live-video-conferencing (LVC) does facilitate participation, both for teachers and students. I'm currently teaching a credit course in Adult Ed to help teachers meet state certification requirements. The program in Cortez is fully equipped to use LVC anywhere and everywhere that folks have the receiving equipment. I meet onsite once a week with teachers in Cortez and broadcast sessions interactively and synchronously to one other teacher in Ignacio, on the So Ute Reservation program. Between meetings, we all "meet" online through Moodle, where teachers access all content, post discussions, submit work, and access their grades with feedback. This is our second offering like this, and it is going very well. If more programs could invest in IVC, these offerings could be shared by five or six different programs at the same time anywhere in the US. What a great network this could become! Not all PD has to be accredited, of course. In CO, where it must be, I work closely with Adams State U. They approve the course and charge minimum tuition fees (\$55/credit). The Adult Ed program here hires me to teach, and teachers sign up. The solution is very cost effective, and teachers can participate in their own communities.

For anyone wanting help applying for the RUS (Dept of Ag) grant, which funds IVC equipment, Ann Miller, Director of Unlimited Learning, Inc in Cortez, is glad to provide good advice and, perhaps, even help from a pro in Texas in writing the grant. Anyone interested can drop me a note, and I'll share her contact info.



donnawparrish / June 21, 2016 - 9:25pm / 0 Likes

Yep! PD is difficult in isolated areas

I am guessing lots of us feel your pain, Leecy. It sounds as though you are getting a grip on thing thee. Here in Oregon there are only a few community colleges that are in heavily populated areas and by far, most are out in the boonies. Across the country, that geographic layout is probably more the norm than the exception. Currently we are working on the idea of "outposts" (which you may have alluded to in your post). The model we are exploring involves video conferencing (using Zoom). The only equipment needed is a computer with video and audio capabilities though a large monitor is a definite plus. Trainers will travel to the more isolated regions to meet with small groups of instructors there and all will participate together as much as possible through LVC. When the small groups are working on their tasks or projects, the cameras will be shut off and at the conclusion of each segment, each group will share their work as they would in face-to-face trainings. There will

still be travel and incurred expenses, but fewer people will do the travel, there will be less disruption of programs, expenses will be lowered and hopefully we will be able to keep the group spirit and synergy created when large numbers of math instructors get together.

I am quite fascinated with the idea of having our adult learners participate in our instructor training as that would add a layer of richness to the work and would probably challenge and encourage all learners...Maybe we are the only trainers that get responses like, "I can't do that activity in my setting..." Additionally incorporating our learners in the trainings would naturally increase the level of transparency as to why instructors and trainers do things the way we do and that, in turn, would encourage and challenge them. There is also a good bit of "pushing the instructor" involved in that idea as it seems that some of our instructors are still bond to using workbooks full of drill, drill, drill. Once students begin to learn in more interactive settings, it's hard to hold them back (How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Paris? Paree?)

Keep on with your great work!

Donna



David J. Rosen / June 22, 2016 - 6:20am / 0 Likes

Professional Development for Teachers and Learners Together

Hello Donna, and others,

You wrote, "I am quite fascinated with the idea of having our adult learners participate in our instructor training as that would add a layer of richness to the work and would probably challenge and encourage all learners...Maybe we are the only trainers that get responses like, 'I can't do that activity in my setting...' Additionally incorporating our learners in the trainings would naturally increase the level of transparency as to why instructors and trainers do things the way we do and that, in turn, would encourage and challenge them."

Several years ago a literacy program in Philadelphia -- was it the Centre for Literacy -- had an innovative professional development model for its tutors. Instead of doing tutor training first and then matching the volunteer tutor and learner, the match was made first and the training was for both the learner and teacher. The idea, if I recall correctly, was to emphasize a team effort, that both members of the team needed to know what the tools and strategies were, and also needed to be able to discuss, for that learner, which strategies were the most engaging and effective. It removed the teacher-student power dynamic. The power dynamic -- that because the teacher is the expert she should make the instructional decisions and the student should carry them out -- is problematic for some adult learners, and not necessarily the most effective way to

teach. If our goal is to help adults become successful lifelong learners, they will need to know and be able to use a range of learning and studying approaches and strategies, and to actively participate in evaluating which ones work and don't work for them for what kinds of learning tasks.

I will be eager to hear how your training for teachers and students together works out. I think you can anticipate some fear and discomfort for both teachers and learners, as well as some curiosity and hope that this might lead to outcomes in which learners become more confident and resourceful, more able to tackle new learning challenges. Let us know what you learn from this.

David J. Rosen

djrosen123@gmail.com



Leecy / June 23, 2016 - 10:16am / 0 Likes

Professional Development for Teachers and Learners Together

David, ditto!!! Leecy



mcorley / June 22, 2016 - 9:22am / 0 Likes

Input on the Six Priorities for PD

Leecy, Donna, and Others:

Thank you for sharing these successful models for PD approaches! We invite others to share their successful PD models, as well as to address the other PD priorities listed in the paper "*Throwing Down the Gauntlet for Professional Development.*" The NCAL Blog (<http://ncalamerica.org/blog>) contains an overview of each of the six priorities and invites your input. We (Gail Spangenberg of NCAL and I) will then gather all your ideas from both the LINCS discussions and the NCAL Blog and synthesize them into a paper that addresses ways to meet the challenges implicit in the six priorities for PD. So, please do continue the discussion here about PD models or, to address any of the six priorities, go to <http://ncalamerica.org/blog>).

Thanks so much! We look forward to your ideas and suggestions for meeting the challenge!

-Mary Ann

Leecy / June 23, 2016 - 11:18am / 0 Likes



Input on the Six Priorities for PD

Mary Anne, I appreciate the work that you and others dedicated to discussing the priorities and posting the blog after CAEPA, and have added a comment or two there. I hope others will do so as well.

As far as offering new PD models, I plan to seek funding for a new approach: Rewarding Adult Ed Instructors! As we have discussed here and elsewhere, Adult Ed instructors and their programs are challenged by serving difficult at-risk students, in difficult circumstances, over long hours, for low pay and few rewards. This approach will fund a three-day PD getaway at a plush, isolated resort, river boat, or even a cruise, all expenses paid. Sessions will cover innovative approaches to solving challenges listed by participants. Days will be filled with super guest presenters, group discussions and projects, games, rest, fun, and a whole lot of food! With a plan like that once a year, maybe instructors will be more willing to invest in PD. I think that the same approach might work, perhaps at a lower scale, to recruit and train committed volunteers! I want to go! Leecy



mcorley / June 23, 2016 - 11:14pm / 0 Likes

Input on the Six Priorities

Thanks, Leecy, for adding your comments to the NCAL Blog. And I love your idea of a PD plan for adult ed instructors! Sign me up! Seriously, 'though, if we could secure adequate funding for an effective PD model, it would necessarily include follow-up sessions (whether in person or online) to your three-day institute. In these follow-up sessions, teacher-participants would be asked to report on the evidence-based strategies they tried in their classes, as well as on their successes and challenges in using these new strategies, and they would describe what they would do differently the next time they use the strategy. They would keep teacher journals in which they would document their successes and challenges. The PD model would include mentoring and peer coaching and teacher self-reflection, all of which would contribute to teachers' refining their practice. And teachers would be compensated for their time and effort spent in professional learning. If we could ever secure funding for such a comprehensive approach to PD, we likely would make significant strides in meeting our goals of (1) retaining quality teachers, and (2) realizing an increase in student achievement. The problem, as I see it, is that we KNOW how to design and deliver the kind of PD needed to achieve these goals--but we lack the funding to deliver such a model. I guess it doesn't hurt to dream....Would love to hear from others on this issue. What do you see as an ideal model of PD for adult ed teachers?

Thanks!

-Mary Ann



Leecy / June 23, 2016 - 10:14am / 0 Likes

Yep! PD is difficult in isolated areas

Donna, I hadn't considered including adult learners in faculty trainings. I wonder what that would look like. I know that the approach would not work for the credit courses I teach since even the instructors complain about the demands of the courses, all of which must meet a long list of state competencies. However, perhaps the blend would work in shorter trainings that target specific topics. Will you share more about what types of trainings you would recommend in that regard, where instructors and students interact in sessions? Leecy