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Introduction

Meeting Every Teacher's Needs

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 put in place a framework for overhauling education in the United States. The driving force behind it was to ensure that schools planned methodically for the education of academically at-risk and advanced students. Use of data was to be key in planning for and assessing improvement, and proven strategies and programs were to be incorporated into schools' plans for improvement. The legislation even mandated that schools analyze data for each student who fails when planning for remediation. Creators of the law left no doubt as to their intent: Individuals' needs must be met to achieve the end of academic success. The intent of this book is to provide a similar framework, albeit much simplified, for ensuring that individual teachers' professional learning needs are met. Such a framework is necessary because, despite definitions of staff development as ongoing individual growth in the context of one's professional role, the typical staff development program for teachers is composed of lectures or demonstrations. Almost never does it incorporate personalized instruction addressing specific teachers' needs (Deojay & Pennington, 2000; National Staff Development Council, 1994). Strangely enough, teachers have clearly stated that when they can direct their professional growth activities, learning is meaningful and results in knowledge and skill improvement (Corabi, 1995; Husby, 2002). The difficulty in meeting teachers' individual needs thus far has been the availability of programs focused upon such an end.

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A FORMAT FOR INDIVIDUALIZING LEARNING

Self-directed learning is simply what it sounds like: direction of a person's learning by himself or herself. When this occurs, learning cannot be any more individualized, since the individual makes every choice about what is learned, how it is learned, and what constitutes success. Adults informally learn in this format all the time, with large to small projects, across brief to more extensive spans of time (Long & Associates, 1993).

The professional growth model described in this book is built around an individualized, self-directed format for learning. The specific staff development program growing from the model is designed to be delivered to a group by a facilitator. It incorporates only four activities during group meetings: completion of a learning plan, mini-lessons to develop self-directedness, independent work on a self-selected project, and individual and group reflections. In order to preserve the purpose of the model—individualized development—at least two-thirds of each session is devoted to independent work.

PARTS OF THE PROGRAM

The goal of self-directed professional development is to lead educators to identify areas for professional improvement, and then to assist them in guiding their own development in a particular growth area. The program rests upon the following four components, which will be discussed in depth:

- **Learning Plan**. The learning plan guides planning for goal focus and methods of gathering and responding to information, transferring learning to practice, and assessing goal achievement.
- **Mini-Lessons.** Mini-lessons focus on skills and information that aid learners in developing self-directedness. Specifically, lessons center on gathering and interpreting various forms of information and data.
- **Learning Project.** Participants may work individually or with a group to complete a project of their choice. Project selection is based upon a combination of self-identified growth areas, professional responsibilities, school and district goals, and a direct connection to student achievement.
- **Reflections.** Each session begins with updates on progress and a statement of the plan for independent work time. Each session closes with a written reflection of the learners' choice on any aspect of the program or their learning.

These activities are led by a facilitator knowledgeable in adult learning or with prior experience and training in such a program.

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HOW LEARNERS RESPOND

For first-time participants in this form of professional development, the range of responses is interesting to say the very least. Typically, the learners expect, contrary to the claim that their learning is to be self-directed, that the facilitator will *tell* them exactly what to do and how to do it. After a couple of weeks, the realization sets in that they are truly in control of their learning. At this point, an array of emotions is experienced, from anger as individuals hit barriers to pure elation when they make leaps toward completing their projects. At the conclusion of the program, the vast number of learners are pleased with their handiwork and subsequently the opportunity to have their specific needs met. The single complaint about the program is that it takes time away from something else, but the realization that this is the case with any staff development is offered as an off-setting point by participants.

HOW THIS IS DIFFERENT FROM TRADITIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Districts and schools have historically relied upon external expertise to provide development activities for their educators, and staff development has consisted of one-day workshops designed around a district goal. Rarely is the information implemented in classrooms (Black, 1998; Collinson, 2000). Participants are generally passive recipients as opposed to collaborative designers of professional learning.

Conversely, in learning organizations, individual schools and their faculties are central in determining needs and planning professional growth activities (Georgia Department of Education, 1997). As the Georgia Department of Education noted, school-focused professional development becomes a process as opposed to an event. As a result, collective learning shifts the model of learning from one-day workshops to learning that is embedded in teachers' roles (Collinson, 2000). As a function of developing the knowledge and skills of personnel to achieve school development, school-focused professional development programs are designed to incorporate adult learning theory and address individual learning needs of educators (Georgia Department of Education, 1997). Zeichner, Klehr, and Caro-Bruce (2000) contended,

> Good professional development respects and builds upon the knowledge and expertise that teachers already have. It allows participants to control and drive the opportunity, and involves inquiry and reflection over time with colleagues about issues that matter most to the teachers involved. (p. 36)

To be clear, the vast difference between this self-directed model and traditional staff development is how content is determined, delivered, and

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assessed. It is the difference between a learning-focused and a sit-and-get model.

In planning for learning through the self-directed model, participants brainstorm interest and growth areas with accompanying background data, then list their job responsibilities. Job responsibilities incorporate school and district goals drawn from student achievement data. From the two lists, a single topic for focus is identified by each participant. Individuals are then led to methodically develop a comprehensive plan for study in the focus area, again considering the impact of their learning on student achievement. Inherent to the plan is a method for assessing knowledge and skill, both at the onset and conclusion of the program, as well as the effects of learning and its application to student achievement. Learning is guided, not delivered, by a facilitator knowledgeable in adult learning. It occurs over time as a process and is job-embedded—directly connected to participants' roles.

Succinctly stated, the primary differences between this model and those historically used are the individualization of learning, development of participants in self-direction of professional learning, and use of a facilitator rather than "an instructor." And in terms of results, all participants have reported either use or intended use of knowledge and skill gained in their professional roles. As well, they noted a direct meeting of their individual needs—in both content and learning style.

ADDRESSING NSDC'S STANDARDS FOR STAFF DEVELOPMENT

Black (1998) found that schools achieving results through staff development implemented programs that aligned with the school's long-term goals for school improvement and student achievement, were derived from research, and adhered to the National Staff Development Council's (NSDC) Standards for Staff Development. The NSDC's 12 standards established an expected level of performance for staff development and are "grounded in research that documents the connection between staff development and student learning" (NSDC, 2001, p. 2). They are organized into three categories: context, process, and content.

Table 1.1 illustrates how the standards and their accompanying expectations are addressed within the self-directed professional development program.

The staff development program was designed to incorporate what was known about adult learning principles, provide for accountability, and adhere to effective staff development practices. For this reason, it naturally aligns with the NSDC's standards and expectations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In order to provide a more complete understanding of the individualized professional development program for facilitators, each of the concepts

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Table 1.1 Relationship Between NSDC Standards and Program Components

Standard	*Expectation*	*Program Component*
Context	Adults are organized into learning communities, and their goals align with school and district goals.	• Delivered in a group setting • Group and individual reflection • Individual goals connected to school and district goals
	School and district leaders will be skillful in guiding continuous school improvement.	• School or district level facilitator guides sessions and ensures participants are aligned with school and district goals.
	Resources are provided to support learning and collaboration among adults.	• Training takes place in a location where computers and online resources are available and adults can work together in small groups.
Process	Staff development programs are data driven.	• School and district goals are based upon needs assessments. Individuals' goals must align with school and district goals and connect directly to student achievement.
	Evaluation is incorporated.	• Participants must assess their knowledge/skill level at the onset and conclusion of the program and demonstrate growth. • Student achievement data may be used to demonstrate improvement in teachers' knowledge and skill. • The impact of learning on student achievement must be accounted for in planning and assessed when the program concludes.
	Staff development programs are research based.	• Self-directed learning and action research, the framework of the program, have been proven effective in impacting student achievement.
	Staff development programs are designed according to intended goals.	• Participants determine their focus area and goal at the onset of the program. All activities are designed toward goal attainment.
	Knowledge about learning is applied in delivering training.	• Adult learning principles, reflection, and professional learning groups are central to the program design.
	Educators' ability to collaborate is developed.	• Small group activities, group reflection, and the option to work with others on a project address collaboration.

(Continued)

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Table 1.1 (Continued)

Standard	*Expectation*	*Program Component*
Content	Equity is addressed by developing understanding and appreciation for all students, impacting the learning environment created, and generating expectations for academic achievement.	• A format for individualized learning within a group context is modeled. • Focus area and goal must impact student achievement.
	Quality teaching is supported through deepening of educators' knowledge of content, strategies, and assessment.	• Individuals' goals must impact student achievement, and therefore content, strategies, and assessment are naturally addressed.
	Family involvement is encouraged by training educators to solicit and engage families in student learning.	*This expectation is not inherently addressed in the program.*

supporting the model will be briefly explained. While the explanations provide only a cursory review of each topic, they should be sufficient to clarify how the pieces of the program work together.

Adult Learning Theory

According to Eduard Lindeman, a pioneer in adult learning theory, "every adult person finds himself in specific situations . . . which call for adjustments. Adult education begins and ends at this point" (Lindeman, 1926, p. 6). Lindeman was of the opinion that subject matter should be brought to the situation and the curriculum built around adult learners' needs and interests. He held five key assumptions about adult learners (Knowles et al., 1998):

- Adults are motivated to learn as their needs and interests require it
- Their orientation to learning is life centered
- Experience is their most valuable resource
- Adults have an inherent need to self-direct their learning
- As individuals age, the differences between them increase

Lindeman asserted, "Authoritative teaching, examinations which preclude original thinking, rigid pedagogical formula—all of these have no place in adult education" (Lindeman, 1926, p. 7).

Lindeman (1926) contended that adults want their talents to be used, to express themselves to others, and foremost, to improve themselves. He stated the spirit and meaning of adult education is not found in formalized educational settings, but in small groups of adults who learn through confronting pertinent situations, who reach into the reservoirs of their experience before reaching for a textbook, and who are led in discussion by teachers who are co-learners.

Malcolm Knowles, known as the father of contemporary adult learning theory (Knowles et al., 1998), also noted that each adult learner's needs and situation differ, and therefore adults are best served when learning is adapted to their "uniqueness" and situational needs. He related six key assumptions that differentiated adult learning from that of children's learning (Knowles et al., 1998):

- Adult learners have a need to know the "what, how and why" of learning
- Their self-concept must be that of an autonomous, self-directing learner
- Prior experience must be used as a resource and understood to contribute to the learner's "mental mode"
- Readiness to learn is life related and based upon developmental tasks
- Adult learners' orientation to learning is problem centered and contextual
- Motivation to learn is intrinsic and incorporates a personal benefit

Knowles stated that the adult "comes into an educational activity largely because he is experiencing some inadequacy in coping with current life problems. He wants to apply tomorrow what he learns today" (Knowles, 1975, p. 48). Knowles proposed self-directed learning as the way to meet specific needs of adult learners.

Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed learning is based on the idea of learner control, as opposed to the role of instructors as sole decision makers. Garrison (1993) listed three factors that had to be present in order for individuals to be in control of their learning: independence to choose goals, support in the form of human and nonhuman resources to achieve goals, and personal ability required to achieve goals. Self-directed learning often will incorporate shared control, combining learner input and the legitimate role of the teacher.

Tough, who studied adults' learning projects and held a slightly different view of adult learning than Knowles, stated that adults' chief motivation for learning is goal-oriented (Bonham, 1992). He noted learning at their own pace, in their own style, in flexible ways, and in their own structure as reasons adults chose to learn on their own (Tough, 1992). Tough

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discussed two goal types: extrinsic and intrinsic (Olgren, 1993). With an extrinsic goal, learning is directed to an end outside the person, such as a reward or promotion. In meeting this type of goal, the learner primarily seeks to reproduce facts, and use of learning is minimal. Intrinsic goals come from within the person and involve use of learning for personal reasons, such as self-improvement. Learners motivated by intrinsic goals become more deeply and personally engaged in learning experiences. Tough (1992) stated that in relation to work, learners do not engage in learning because they cannot perform the job, but instead they learn because they want to do a *good* job.

Tough listed four major benefits of self-directed learning for adults (Kasworm, 1992): It is specific to the learner's needs and preferences; learning is under the individual's control; learning opportunities are available even when expert courses or materials are not; and lastly, it is convenient for the learner.

While Tough focused on self-directed learning by adults working independently, Knowles chose to concentrate his work on self-directed learning within a group setting. Knowles described four characteristics of self-directed learning in a group:

- Adult learners become more self-directed over time
- Responsibility for learning is placed on individual learners
- A climate of warmth, respect, support, and trust is emphasized
- The learner may need assistance in becoming a proficient self-directed learner (Long & Associates, 1993)

Knowles strongly suggested respect be given to adult learners and the experiences they bring, while simultaneously nurturing them to develop their self-directedness.

Although Knowles was a prominent advocate for self-directed learning, he recognized there are situations when teacher-led instruction may be preferred (Knowles, 1989). One such situation is when the learner has little or no experience with the topic being explored. Another is when the learner is under external pressure to master a large amount of subject matter. Even in these cases, Knowles noted the importance of critical thinking on the part of learners to ensure growth.

Action Research

Action research is the investigation, by educators, into the effectiveness of instructional practices and programs within their schools (Calhoun, 1994). The process includes five basic phases: (a) identification of an interest area or problem, (b) collection of baseline data, (c) organization of data, (d) interpretation of data as related to the interest area or problem, and (e) implementation of an action plan in response to data. This framework for improvement is cyclical; based on data and outcomes, subsequent interest or problem areas are identified, then the process repeats. Whether

conducted by individual teachers or groups of colleagues, Calhoun (1994) found the benefit of action research to be the potential for individuals to develop a professional mindset and improve their performance by becoming adept problem solvers.

Action research has been employed in a variety of formats (Auger & Wideman, 2000; Feldman, 1998; Poetter, McKamey, Ritter, & Tisdel, 1999; Robertson, 2000; Sardo-Brown, 1995; Vulliamy, 1991). While the particular approaches to action research vary, the basic methods, benefits, and constraints of the process are fairly common. Often research is conducted by those working in a school. Conversation with facilitators and peers is highly beneficial in advancing learning. Overwhelmingly, participants express intent to apply the knowledge gained in their professional roles. And of particular importance, reflection is repeatedly described as the key to creating change, and successful action researchers have noted the provision of time to reflect during the process.

Reflection

Mezirow (2000) stated that individuals' identity and reality are shaped by their cultures and relationships. According to his theory of transformational learning, one must confront ingrained beliefs and critically reflect upon them in order to transform and grow. He asserts the vehicle for reflection is collaborative discussion with others, where different perspectives are presented and viewpoints challenging norms are encouraged. True growth, or transformational learning, occurs in four ways according to Mezirow: by stating current thoughts, by learning new thoughts, by transforming thoughts, or by changing mental habits. He contended that aiding adults to become autonomous thinkers is both a method and a goal for adult educators.

Professional Learning Groups

Through group learning, staff developers can offer adults opportunities for intellectual challenge and stimulation within a safe setting (Murphy, 1999; Zeichner et al., 2000). Murphy found that teacher study groups can impact not only students, but also the school's overall culture, assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors. Tichenor and Heins (2000) found that faculty members of schools using study groups reported the groups made a significant contribution to achievement of school goals. Hirsch and Sparks (1999) noted that learning teams that are successful solve common problems, meet weekly and set incremental goals, analyze results after implementation, and discuss instructional methods. Tichenor and Heins added that successful group learning occurs when participation is voluntary, activities encourage participation, time is provided for implementation and reflection, and participants are included in selection of materials.

Tichenor and Heins (2000) stated, "The process of exploring questions and sharing solutions in a trusting and supportive environment paves the

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way for renewed teaching and learning and facilitates the development of professional learning communities" (p. 317). They offer the following guidelines for success when organizing collaborative groups: Permit voluntary participation, allow participants to determine topics and activities for study in relation to school goals, permit time for implementation and reflection, provide incentives for remaining in the group, include a reasonable number of members, and provide assistance to the group in getting started. Murphy (1999) suggested that within a group, all members should have equal status so that no participant is deferred to because of title, degree level, or other factors of rank. As well, Murphy contended, equal status encourages more productive group participation, as the underlying assumption is that all members have something of value to contribute to the group. In essence, collaborative group learning is built upon understanding and respect for each group member's perspectives and the development of skills for effectively communicating and addressing group goals.

CONCLUSION

The framework of the self-directed professional development program was designed to account for the developmental and professional needs of educators while responding to larger school goals. The purpose of this book is to provide a model for individualizing professional learning. As a whole, the model provides an inexpensive, versatile, personalized approach to simultaneously addressing teacher needs, organizational goals, and student achievement.

The model includes four components: completion of a learning plan, mini-lessons to develop self-directedness, independent work on a self-selected project, and individual and group reflections. Across the professional development program, participants often experience a range of emotions as they encounter barriers and find successes. This model is founded upon self-directed learning and incorporates the guidance of a facilitator as opposed to an instructor. It is fundamentally different from traditional staff development in that each participant has control over his or her development, and learning occurs through a job-embedded program. The model is designed around what is known about adult learning and effective staff development, and it closely aligns with the National Staff Development Council's Standards for Staff Development. The conceptual framework draws upon adult learning theory, self-directed learning, action research, reflection, and professional learning groups.