

## **Lesson Six – Capstone Paper**

### Purpose of Professional Development

Professional development within the setting of my Head Start program, while focused on teachers, actually impacts everyone. All professional development activities, within my program, are based upon or influenced by the federal statute commonly known as the *Head Start Act*, which reauthorized the Head Start program in 2007. This law addresses professional development as a teacher in-service requirement and reads as follows: “Each Head Start teacher shall attend not less than 15 clock hours of professional development per year. Such professional development shall be high-quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher’s performance in the classroom, and regularly evaluated by the program for effectiveness” (Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007). While the Head Start Act is specific to teachers in all Head Start programs, in my program it influences our thinking about everyone’s professional development. It should also be noted that the source of the professional development opportunities is not designated. Each program is free to design their own plans and provide either in-service trainings, outside the program opportunities or a combination of both.

While the Head Start Act is specific about clock hours for teachers our program has decided to include non-teaching staff in our plans and that all hours are to be high-quality, sustained, intensive and program-focused training opportunities. My program’s interpretation and

application of this portion of the Head Start Act is that direct service staff, teachers and social workers, must receive 15 hours of professional development training and that there are training opportunities available for all staff even if they do not provide direct service. All training should be focused on improving their skills and thus by improving their skills the whole organization will improve.

We have supported quite a few staff as they have re-entered college in search of a baccalaureate or advanced degree, thus many of us think of ourselves as lifelong learners. We recognize that we want to develop our preschoolers as learners so that they too will become lifelong learners. As Dirkx and Austin point out when discussing their model of Continuing Professional Development “the idea of lifelong learning has increasingly become an accepted feature of individual and collective life” (Dirkx & Austin, 2005, p. 3). An important caveat to improving individual skills, within my program, is that any professional development training undertaken must be related to the type of work that the individual performs in the program. Opportunities for our preschool teachers to take accounting classes will not be offered for example. So while the focus is on the individual the overall goal is to improve the organization. Gilley, Egglund and Gilley describe the mission of Human Resource Development (HRD) as “(1) to provide individual development focused on performance improvement related to a current job; (2) to provide career development focused on performance improvement related to future job assignments; (3) to develop performance management systems used to enhance organizational performance capacity and capability; and (4) to provide organizational development that results in both optimal utilization of human potential and improved human performance, which together enhance the culture of an organization, and thus its effectiveness” (Gilley, Egglund & Gilley, 2002, pp. 12-13). My program just focuses on the first two items; we

have not developed the organizational capacity to even begin to think about performance management systems or optimal utilization of human potential. We really are at the point where our focus is on the individual, the type of work that they do and the context in which they perform. Our goal is to improve their performance and thus we operate with the assumption, one could say hope, that improving the individual will build a better program. Dirx and Austin write that “the individual learner’s needs and interests are seen as intimately bound up with this work context. But what is to be learned with regard to this work depends on the program’s overall purpose and focus, and the extent to which these needs and interests shape what is to be learned” (Dirx & Austin, 2005, p. 14).

Now that it has been established that our focus is on improving the organization through the improvement of the individual, where can I assist with this. My educational background is in economics and my work experience began in finance and budgeting. Budgeting is what actually got me started with this Head Start program. In the 1990s the program grew to the point to where they needed a budget director and I was the first to fill that role. Within a few years I became the program director and since then I enrolled in the educational leadership program to develop my own skills and to better understand and support the work of the program, which brought me to this class.

Now while the environment in which I will provide and support professional development is quite broad, 40 teachers, 25 support staff and 5 administrators, my actual role will be quite limited. It is quite limited because without the training or a degree in teaching most of my staff will not accept me as someone who can teach those practices that will help them improve their classroom environment or instruction. I do not hold out any false hope that they would. However, my role in all of this is really twofold. First I must work with the administrative team

to identify performance issues and then address those issues so that they are eliminated and secondly I have a direct responsibility to make sure the program meets and exceeds all of our regulations.

Staff often do not recognize that our regulations are designed to ensure quality and when these regulations change then we need to change as well. It is my responsibility to help staff understand the importance of our compliance with our ever changing regulations. At the beginning of every school year I provide the training that reviews the changes that will impact the way we provide services.

### Assumptions

Essentially there will be three types of adult learners that I will be working with; those who are intrinsically motivated to learn, those who are extrinsically motivated to learn and those that exhibit low motivational levels for learning. These assumptions are based on my own observations of the staff that I have worked with, in this program, over the last 17 years.

I began with Head Start 20 years ago and at that time the big educational push for teachers was to go from having no educational requirements for being a teacher to requiring that all teachers had a Child Development Associate (CDA). This is not an associate's degree, but rather a national credentialing program that roughly translates into the equivalent of 12 college credits. All of the teaching staff who began their careers in Head Start when the teaching requirements were this low took one of two paths as the educational requirements increased over time from a CDA to an associate's degree to the upcoming requirement, in 2013, of a baccalaureate degree in early childhood education. One path was to not pursue any further

education and hang on as a teacher for as long as they qualified and then be demoted to teacher assistant. The second path, for these teachers, was to go back to school.

Those who were demoted are some of our oldest staff and have been the ones who have demonstrated little motivation for lifelong education. Gorard and Selwyn note in their research that “older groups are less likely to have been involved in any learning, despite the longer time they have had to do so” (Gorard & Selwyn, 2005, p. 1199). This lack of desire to learn in a formal setting to some extent is reflected in their attitudes towards learning at staff in-service trainings. Since in-service trainings are the context in which I have provided trainings in the past I have found these individuals are more likely to be less interested in learning about what changes are coming to the program.

Those who choose school are in fact responding to an external pressure to go back to school; it is a new requirement. They are extrinsically motivated to pursue lifelong education and in some respects are more and more like the students in classrooms today. Crow points out that in today’s classrooms “techniques for motivating children are becoming increasingly extrinsic in the light of the pressure put on teachers in the US to emphasize the type of instruction that will raise test scores, and not necessarily foster motivation to learn” (Crow, 2006, p. 30). This is a somewhat similar to the environment in my program. Teacher educational requirements are increasing, for those staff that have been with the program a long time, this creates extrinsic motivation for learning – they want to keep their teaching job. The negative impact is the same as in the classroom; there is no or little motivation to learn.

The remaining staff, while intrinsically motivated to learn, did not all start that way. Essentially, we have some staff members that have pursued their baccalaureate or advanced degree in early childhood education without the requirement for doing so being in place. For

others, they began the journey of adult learning because the teacher qualifications were changing. So they began with extrinsic motivation. However, this experience has ignited their inner motivation and they are pursuing their education beyond the minimum change in educational requirements. These individuals are lifelong learners. “Lifelong learners are people who display an attitude and ability that prompts them to learn across their life spans” (Crow, 2006, p. 22).

### Conceptual Framework

I am influenced by both Silberman and his book *Active Training* and Branch and his book *Instructional design: The ADDIE approach*. There are a number of reasons for this. First, in my program our curriculum is based on the concept of active learning and both Silberman and Branch seem to have this quality. Now active learning in practice for infants, toddlers and preschoolers is much different than adults. Children will be involved in learning that teaches them through active play. Adults, on the other hand, are active learners when the focus of learning is on the adult as a student. Branch describes student-centered spaces as places where adult learning should be taking place. “Student-centered spaces, wherever they are located, represent an epistemological shift from regarding students as the occupants of learning, to regarding the *actions* of students during guided learning as the motivation for the design of instruction” (Branch, 2009, p. 6). If the staff members as adult learners are not just occupants of learning, then they will be actively engaged in learning. Currently, I would regard any trainings that I have done in the past with staff as examples where the staff were occupants of learning. I lectured them and they looked like they were listening, but how much were they really listening. As Silberman points out “between 80 to 90 percent of all information that is absorbed by the

brain is visual (Jensen, 2000)” (Silberman, 2006, p. 3). It will be quite a change to engage them in an active manner and get them involved in their learning.

The second reason that I am influenced by Branch and Silberman is that as soon as I read about performance gaps I was within a short period of time able to utilize this concept at work. Both Branch and Silberman discuss it and I was able to share this information with the administrative team in an effort to shape our efforts on staff improvement; efforts that are focused on the individual. Branch discusses performance gaps and writes that “the purpose of the Analyze phase is to identify the probable causes for a performance gap” (Branch, 2009, p. 24). He goes on to identify the probable causes for a performance gap. “Practically all causes for a performance discrepancy can be categorized as one of the following: A) Lack of Resources, B) Lack of Motivation, C) Lack of Knowledge and Skill” (Branch, 2009, p. 27). I took this concept and helped the administrative team in my program understand that our efforts to assist staff with performance issues should focus in these three areas. It has already made a difference because it brought focus to the difference between a lack of resources, a lack of motivation, and a lack of knowledge. As Silberman points out “training is not always the right solution, because the root cause of the problem is not always a lack of knowledge or skill” (Silberman, 2006, p. 22). The concept of a performance gap helped us recognize that we need to assess the situation to determine the reason for the discrepancy in performance. We had never given voice to the thought that maybe poor performance was due to too few resources being available. This concept also helped us differentiate between when there is no motivation to do the job right and when the skills are missing to do the job right.

The third reason I find myself influenced by Branch and Silberman is that their books are easy to follow. They are guidebooks that can be pulled off the shelf and reviewed for insight and

examples on how to conduct a needs assessment and how to utilize alternatives to lecturing such as group inquiry, for example. (Silberman, 2006) These two books I will keep after the course is over and the others I will be selling back to Amazon.com.

### Training Strategies

There are essentially two contexts in which I envision using some of the training strategies that I have been exposed to in this course. While I previously mentioned how the idea of a performance gap has been useful when assessing individuals, the first context in which I will utilize some training strategies is in the area of assessing needs. When we address performance gaps with individual staff members we must keep alert to the possibility that this may not be an isolated performance issue. If, as an administrative team, we came to the conclusion that we are not experiencing isolated incidents, then it will become necessary for us to assess the true extent of our performance gap. Queeney identifies methods for assessing needs. “Using questions, interviews, observations, and other measures, needs assessments determine the differences between existing and desired knowledge, skills, and performance abilities. From the differences found, educational needs that may be amenable to educational interventions are identified” (Queeney, 1995, p. 2). Silberman is in agreement with Queeney and the need for an assessment as he states “you need to determine whether training is the answer to the concerns being addressed. This requires an assessment process...” (Silberman, 2006, p. 22). Essentially, when determining that there is a performance gap we need to answer the following questions: 1) will training address this issue? 2) is this an individual issue or a systemic problem for the program?

Now, if at the end of assessing our gap in performance we conclude that training is needed this is the point that we would determine if we have that knowledge within the program



to conduct the training or whether it will be necessary to go outside the program for assistance. We have several staff within the program certified as trainers for some of the curricula that we use; so we can handle that training within the program. It would also be possible to handle specific software training needs within the program due to our level of experience. If we do identify a need that cannot be met within the program, then this would be a situation where we would seek out opportunities outside the program.

The second context within which I envision using some of the training strategies that I have learned in this course is when I am a presenter during an in-service training. As I explained previously I do share information with staff about changes to our rules and regulations. In the past this has been an activity where I act as a lecturer explaining what the change is, why it is important and what impact it will have on their work lives. I expect to approach these in-service updates in a much different manner in the future by beginning with the physical setup of the training. “The physical setup of a training facility is the first impression that participants will have as they begin their session” (Silberman, 2006, p. 214). Make a good first impression, set up the room in a comfortable and pleasing manner and then instead of lecturing about the material and trying to figure out how this will impact staff and their work I will now take a different approach. I will now look at these sessions as opportunities to actively engage staff in an exercise that will have them participate in their own learning. Silberman describes eight alternatives to lecturing and some of these, such as group inquiry, will work to engage and involve staff in learning why and how our changing regulations are going to impact them in their classrooms and in their offices. Of particular interest is the concept of group inquiry. Silberman writes that “instead of asking questions, the trainer can challenge participants to devise their own questions to further their understanding of a topic” (Silberman, 2006, p. 106). Instead of

lecturing staff on how our changing regulations will impact them I can challenge the staff to determine the relevant factors themselves and have that shared with the group as a whole.

### Overall Approach

The overall approach that I will have to professional development is to keep it simple. My opportunities to present to staff are limited in number and time. I expect to present to them on only two or three occasions during the year and at most have about one hour to work with. There will be no long and drawn out plans for my presentations. The goal is to move away from lectures where I direct information at them and move towards an environment that engages more senses and has them more actively engaged in their learning. Some introductory comments from Silberman are actually good closing thoughts for me to remember. First of all, I need to remember that “participants should be given a chance every eight minutes to internalize what they have been hearing” (Silberman, 2006, p. 3). I also need to internalize that “learning is enhanced if people are asked to do the following with their peers: 1) State the information in their own words 2) Give examples of it 3) See connections between it and the other facts or ideas 4) Apply it to case situations” (Silberman, 2006, p. 4). One last thought is that “without the opportunity to discuss, ask questions, do, and perhaps even teach someone else, real learning will not occur” (Silberman, 2006, p. 5).

## References

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