ANDRAGOGY AND TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

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The state of American education has entered an era of accountability with the passing of the No Child Left Behind legislation of 2001. The legislation calls for States to ensure that all students are proficient in reading and math within 12 years. The No Child Left Behind legislation has been a catalyst to reform our schools to bring about a change in student performance. In order to bring about this change, states have demanded that districts create school improvement plans to ensure Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) towards this goal of 100% proficiency in math and reading for their students. One way school districts have begun to combat student performance issues is through site-based professional development. Districts are identifying areas of weakness in student performance, using researched based strategies to target those weaknesses, and instruct teachers to implement these strategies in hopes of increasing student achievement.

With the nature of learning that takes place during professional development, andragogy will be the theoretical framework for this study. Andragogy is the theory of adult learning that was pioneered by Malcolm Knowles in the last 40 years. Andragogy differs from pedagogy (the theory of teaching children). Pedagogy is the theory that is teacher-centered where one imparts knowledge and skills to another. Andragogy is learner-centered. Taylor and Kroth (2009) reviewed Knowles six areas or assumptions that drive how adults gain knowledge. They are as follows:

1. Self-Concept: adults are more self-directed.
2. Experience: more experiences to draw from as one matures.
3. Readiness to learn: part of self-development.
5. Motivation to learn: based on intrinsic motivation for goal attainment.
6. The need to know: relevancy of subject to be learned.

The nature of the proposed study is to review the level of andragogy employed in professional development among schools run by National Heritage Academies and measure the effectiveness of the employed andragogy. National Heritage Academies is an educational company that operates 67 charter schools in eight states across the country. The company has embarked on a professional development plan for its employees to implement a new curriculum, formative assessment strategies, and standards-based grading. In order for these reforms to be implemented with fidelity across all 67 schools, National Heritage Academies is looking to the administration of the schools to participate in trainings regarding these reforms. The administration is then expected to take the role of instructional leader and return to their schools to lead the professional development of their staff. Questions to be considered for the study are as follows:

1. Do administrators have knowledge of andragogical concepts?

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2. How will administrators address each area of andragogy in mandated professional development?
3. How will the effectiveness of the professional development be measured compared to the level of employed andragogy?

By answering these questions, the study intends to identify ways to ensure fidelity of professional development goals in adult learners.

In the past 10 years, literature has confirmed Knowles theory of andragogy and its effective implementation in teacher professional development programs. One area that has been stated in literature is the importance of the principal (as instructional leader) to create an environment that is conducive to the adult learner (Terehoff, 2002, Pohland & Bova, 2000). The environment has been described by Terehoff (2002) as a “comfortable physical atmosphere, positive interpersonal climate, and well-prepared organizational setting.” In both situations, the principal acts as a facilitator to create an atmosphere of enthusiasm, collaboration, challenge and comfort; both physically and psychologically. By doing this, the adult learner will be able to better facilitate their learning.

Other areas identified to increase adult learner intrinsic motivation are mutual planning of the professional development between principal and staff. By allowing teachers to have input into what problems need to be solved through the professional development, the teachers will be more likely to be engaged in the material being presented. Principals should also be mindful of their staffs’ needs and interests when creating the program design of the professional development to provide for psychological comfort of the adult learner. It is important for the principal to clearly communicate the goals and objectives for the professional development and to have a measurement for evaluation of the learning that has taken place (Terehoff, 2002).

A basis for how effectiveness will be measured in the professional development outcomes; both Terehoff (2002) and Pohland et al. (2000) call for an evaluation of the professional development. Pohland suggests the learner should reflect on the learning, as “reflection is at the heart of transformative learning” (p.144). In order for transformative learning to take place, the learner must reflect on three types of change; change in assumptions, perspective, and behavior. In essence, the nature of professional development is to “move beyond the acquisition model and focuses more specifically on connecting theory to practice” (Harris, Lowery-Moore, Farrow, 2008, p. 319).

In order to understand the human element of the study, a qualitative approach would be a first step in gaining understanding of how the individual teachers feel about their learning. Survey and interview research will be conducted throughout National Heritage Academies in southeast Michigan: South Arbor Academy (Ypsilanti), Fortis Academy (Ypsilanti), Canton Charter Academy (Canton), Achieve Academy (Van Buren Twp.), Keystone Academy (Belleville) and Metro Academy (Romulus). SurveyMonkey will be the platform for the survey using closed-ended questions around previous experiences regarding professional development. Close-ended questions will be in the form of Likert-scale questions in order to give some form of quantifiable results during this first phase of the research. Based on the figures from the survey, themes will be deciphered and interview questions will be created and employed. Teachers from the participating schools will be interviewed. Sampling of teachers will take into account gender, length of tenure, and age to reach a diverse population.

In order to have a quantitative portion of the study, results from the survey, as well as using Knowles theory of andragogy, will be the basis to create experimental and control groups during the course of the four sessions of professional development (National Heritage Academies demands that its schools have four professional development days during the school year). The experimental group (by school) will use principles of andragogy during professional development in the creation and grading of standards-based assessments. The control group (by school) will receive the same content of the professional development using pedagogical approaches. It will be important to ensure that the material presented to both groups are the same, only the approaches, or how the material is presented is different. After each session, a quantifiable survey will be given to all participants regarding their feelings about their learning for that day along with open-ended...
questions to provide feedback.

At the end of the four sessions of professional development, results of teacher satisfaction regarding their learning will be compiled and reported out. As a follow up to the learning, the participants in the experimental and control groups will have their work reviewed to test the fidelity of implementation of the initiative: amount of assessments written, quality of assessments, and teacher ability to grade the assessments. Finally, a quantitative summary of the effectiveness of the professional development in adult learners comparing andragogical and pedagogical approaches will be produced.

This type of research would be considered cross-sectional, explanatory study research due to the fact that the research would be within a current and defined amount of time in order to explain how adults learn best.

CITED LITERATURE


