



CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS

As noted throughout this publication, it is important to create professional development programs for support professionals, but it is equally important to ensure that such programs will provide meaningful help in their daily work lives.

According to Frances C. Welch and Cherry Daniel in an article entitled “Staff Development for Classified Staff: One School District’s Approach”

(*The Journal of Staff Development*, Winter 1997, Volume 18, No. 1, at pages 12-15) there are certain essential elements necessary in any adult learning process. The authors described the staff development program for the classified staff in the Dorchester School District Two in Summerville, South Carolina. The program in Dorchester was based on “the five characteristics of adult learners.” The characteristics of adult learners include:

7 Issues for Successful ESP Staff Development

The conclusions and recommendations for staff development for support employees reached by Welch and Daniel include seven considerations:

1 TIMING

Timing has two components — one, making the time for staff development programs for classified staff; and two, considering the overall schedule for all school and district programs so as to limit conflicts for participants. Additionally, as a survey of your members should show, a training or workshop should be scheduled at a time that works best for the respective support staff group. An example the authors noted was that custodians’ staff development should occur when school is in session, as on days when students are not present they perform services that cannot be done when students are in the school.



2 COMPENSATION

The authors found some form of compensation should be provided to those classified staff members who engage in staff development programs, or participation in training should be made a condition of employment.

3 FUNDING

Sources of funds to meet the needs of training should be a consideration during the planning sessions, with possible funding sources being adult education, the district’s staff development, or the target group’s budget.



4 SELECTION OF PRESENTERS

Consideration should be given to using internal presenters who will save costs and reinforce the employees who are having success in the approach they are using by giving them peer recognition. For example, paraeducators who are introduced to an innovative program created by another paraeducator are going to be much more likely to realize they too have the capacity to add to the overall instructional program.

1. Adults will commit to learning when goals and objectives are understandable, important, and have immediate application.
2. Staff development should be non-threatening and promote a positive view of self.
3. Adults will learn, retain, and use what they perceive to be relevant to their personal and professional needs.
4. Staff development should include concrete, practical, and applied learning in real or simulated work settings.
5. Staff development planners need to give participants some control over what, when, and where they learn.

5 CONNECTION TO THE OVERALL DISTRICT AND GOALS There should be link between how the particular staff development program will help meet the district's goals. The authors suggest that having a district administrator present at the training session will reinforce the link between support professionals and the district. Further, a representative from the district's administration can convey that staff development for support staff is valued and that their participation is appreciated.

6 FOLLOW-UP AND EVALUATION Participants should be included in formulating follow-up activities and designing the evaluation process. The authors note that "participants are more committed to the entire process when they are involved in deciding the what, who, how, why, when, and where of their staff development activities." Additionally having data that shows the effectiveness of the staff development programs is reinforcing to all involved.

7 EMPHASIS ON PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR LIFELONG LEARNING

Staff development for support professionals must emphasize that continued learning is important and valued in the district. ESP should be encouraged to apply this learning with others, resulting in the overall improvement of education. Considerations for staff development programs for support personnel are centered on the involvement of the participants to create their own destinies for lifelong learning. Equally important is making clear to participating employees the link between their staff development program and the overall goals of the district. Staff development programs are also an opportunity for districts to express recognition and appreciation to the often unsung heroes who are the ESP.

