

Endnote: Leading, Learning, and Supporting Adult Development for All Educators

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The theme for this year's journal is "*Leading and Learning: Supporting Adult Development for All Educators.*" The subject of adult learning has seen increased recognition during the past decade. Over twenty years ago, California established the New Teacher Project (NTP), a forerunner of the current Beginning Teacher Support and Assessment System (BTSA) which was developed to support new teachers in their journey in becoming an expert educator (Moir & Baron, 2002). Research on the NTP found that through intensive support, training, and assessment, teachers participating in the project provided better instruction for students (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 1992).

Recently, organizations such as the Association for California School Administrators (ACSA) and the New Teacher Center have been offering training for those willing to coach and mentor school administrators (<http://cust-65-98-140-199.static.o1.com/MainMenuCategories/ProfessionalLearning/LeadershipCoaching.aspx>). With this renewed interest in supporting adult learning, educational leadership programs are uniquely poised to provide opportunities for candidates to gain insight and knowledge into how adults learn and how to support adult learning in the K–12 community.

Adult Learning Theory

How do adults learn? Bransford, Brown, and Cocking (2000) indicated that the process of learning, as well as the transfer of learning, is central to the development of competency. Transfer is defined as "the ability to extend what has been learned in one context to new contexts" (p. 51). Although discussing the implications for student education, the characteristics of learning and transfer also are appropriate for adult learning: initial learning is necessary for transfer, and a considerable amount is known about the kinds of learning experiences that support transfer: knowledge that is overly contextualized can reduce transfer and abstract representations of knowledge can help promote transfer; transfer is best viewed as an active, dynamic process rather than a passive end-product of a particular set of learning experiences; all new

learning involves transfer based on previous learning, which has important implications for the design of instruction (p. 53).

Transformative learning, what Mezirow (1978) defined as the way in which a person looks at himself and his relationships, is based on constructivist assumptions that one develops personal meaning from individual experience and experiences with others. Critical reflection and critical self-reflection are integral to the process of transformative learning, how adults examine frames of reference that in turn make one “more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (Cranston, 2006, p. 36). This mirrors the work of Schon (1978) and others who advocate the use of critical reflection to resolve complex problems of practice.

According to Drago-Severson (2009), “transformational learning changes how a person knows” (p. 35). Her *Four Pillars of Practice* (2006) theory supports adult learning in the following ways: *teaming*, with growth opportunities for individuals, organizations, and systems; *providing leadership roles* by learning and growing from leading together; *collegial inquiry* through engaging in shared dialogue and reflection on practice; and *mentoring* through building meaningful and growth-enhancing relationships. These four conditions, informed by Kegan’s constructive-developmental theory (1982), help create and sustain a vibrant learning community at the school site. Kegan’s (1982) constructive-developmental theory tenets that a person is active in his or her own meaning-making, and how the cognitive, affective, interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences one has impacts one’s view of the self and of the world.

Powerful Learning for All

In their book, *School Leadership That Works*, Marzano, Water, and McNulty (2005) not only outlined the responsibilities of a school leader but also provided a plan that enhances the achievement of all students: developing a strong school leadership team; distributing some responsibilities throughout the leadership team; selecting the right work; identifying the order of magnitude implied by the selected work; and matching the management style to the order of the magnitude of the change initiative. Marzano’s (2003) work also suggested that to engage teachers in meaningful professional development, there must be a focus on content, active learning, and an overall coherence within the plan. These suggestions resonate with Schmoker’s (2001) work in researching schools whose strategies resulted in dramatically increased student performance.

Often, professional development programs for teachers are flawed in design. Donovan, Bransford, and Pellegrino (1999), reported that programs are often not learner centered, assessment centered, nor community centered. They propose a framework to guide the “design and evaluation of environments that can optimize learning” (p. 19). There are four interrelated characteristics of the framework:

1. Schools and classrooms must be learner centered (p. 19).
2. To provide a knowledge-centered classroom environment, attention must be given to what is taught (information, subject matter), why it is taught (understanding), and what competence or mastery looks like (p. 21).
3. Formative assessments—ongoing assessments designed to make students’ thinking visible to both teachers and students—are essential. They permit the teacher to grasp the students’ preconceptions, understand where students are in the “developmental corridor” from informal to formal thinking, and design instruction accordingly. In the assessment centered classroom environment, formative assessments help both teachers and students monitor progress (p. 21).
4. Learning is influenced in fundamental ways by the context in which it takes place. A community-centered approach requires the development of norms for the classroom and school, as well as connections to the outside world, that support core learning values (p. 22).

While the framework concentrates on children as learners, the principles are also appropriate for adult learning.

The work of Dufour and Eaker (1998) has become popular as school leaders recognized that “tinkering around the edges” of school reform was not increasing student achievement. DuFour and Eaker’s model of professional learning communities call for the following: shared mission, vision, and values; collective inquiry; collaborative teams; action orientation; continuous improvement; and results orientation. Professional development in a learning community is exhibited by a focus on both generic and discipline-specific teaching skills; expands the repertoire of teachers to meet the needs of students who learn in different ways; is attentive to the tenets of good teaching; provides the coaching critical to mastery of new skills; results in reflection and dialogue; and the process is sustained over a considerable period of time.

In a joint publication from Corwin Press and the Ontario Principals’ Council, a professional learning community is described as “the synergy of collaborative action” (p. 5). Synergy comes from the Greek word *synergos*, describing how working together increases effectiveness and achievement through combined action. Wegner’s (1998) work argued that communities of practice are “not only a context for the learning of newcomers but also, and for the same reasons, a context for new insights to be transformed into knowledge” (p. 214). Shirley Hord, an educational researcher, was once quoted as saying “Staff development is not an event” (2008). She believes professional learning must be ongoing, job-embedded and results-driven. How do our own programs stack up against this measure?

This year’s theme focused on strategies and practices that can be used by administrators to promote powerful adult learning that translates to powerful learning for all students. Leading for learning focuses on ensuring that our school leaders possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions neces-

sary to support adult learning; that school leaders can apply the principles of adult learning to promote better teaching and learning for all students; and that school leaders establish a culture of collaboration, innovation, and inquiry while promoting learning for all. Leading for learning focuses on building relationships with our teachers through the work of professional learning communities and recognizing their work in support of student learning. While this is an endnote to the contributed journal articles, it is only the beginning of our work as CAPEA members. If we are not ensuring that theories of adult development and high-quality professional development designs are being role-modeled and taught in our courses, we are missing a great opportunity. According to Jacobs (1997), it is important for us to keep the end in mind: learning about adult development theory and its impact on teaching and learning begins in our classrooms.

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