The National Literacy Act of 1991 provided the funding to begin building an adult literacy staff development infrastructure by requiring all states to increase their staff development funding from 10% to 15%. Inquiry-based staff development was one of the most promising models to emerge from the staff development activities conducted in 1992-1993 as a result of the act's passage. Inquiry-based staff development evolved in response to identified needs such as the following: the need for a critical perspective, the need to problematize the knowledge base in adult literacy, the need for staff development to be practiced as an ongoing process, and the need to focus on program improvement. Among the steps involved in inquiry-based staff development are the following: reflecting on practice, gathering information, studying the information through analysis, planning actions to be taken, implementing the action plan, monitoring and evaluating results, and sharing what has been learned. The following are among the issues associated with inquiry-based staff development: time, trust, support, and expectations. (An annotated bibliography of 19 print resources about staff development and a list of 5 resource organizations are included.) (MN)
The passage of the National Literacy Act of 1991 provided the funding and the opportunity to begin building an adult literacy staff development infrastructure. The act required that each state increase its staff development funding by 5% (from 10 to 15%), and “no fewer than 53 states and territories implemented new training activities through 1992 and 1993 as a result of this act” (Quigley 1995, p. 61). Among these training activities can be detected some exciting new trends in staff development. Probably the most prominent is the movement toward inquiry-based models of staff development in which practitioners improve their own practice through reading, sharing, observing, and critically reflecting (Crandall 1994). Although teacher research is the best known method of inquiry-based staff development, it also involves other practices, all grounded in teachers’ knowledge and teachers’ questions (Fingeret and Cockley 1992).

Inquiry-based staff development grows out of a number of themes found in the literature on staff development in adult basic education (ABE) and in public schools including the following (Fingeret 1992, pp. 23-24):

- The need for a critical perspective
- The need to problematize the knowledge base in adult literacy
- The need for staff development to be practiced as an ongoing process, generated by teachers and making use of resources in the environment
- The need for community
- The need for a focus on program improvement

Inquiry-based staff development involves a number of steps: problem identification through reflecting on practice; gathering information; studying the information through analysis, critique, and interpretation; planning an action to be taken; implementing the action plan; monitoring and evaluating the changes that take place as a result; and sharing what has been learned (Drennon 1994c). Some issues associated with inquiry-based staff development include the following (ibid.):

- Time. Inquiry-based staff development is supposed to be embedded in rather than added onto practice, but concern has been expressed that practitioners need additional time to engage in the steps.
- Trust. If practitioners are expected to make public the problem areas of their work, trust must be created among teachers and between teachers and administrators.
- Support. Administrators must sustain the inquiry process, especially as it relates to supporting program-level innovations through the adoption of new ideas.
- Expectations. Closely related to the issue of support is the one of building up practitioner expectations for changes that will occur as a result of inquiry-based projects. If policy-level changes do not occur, practitioners may become discouraged and further disenfranchised.

Unfortunately, the recent support for additional adult literacy staff development efforts may be lost as a part of the 104th Congress’ efforts to streamline government. What will not be lost, however, is the knowledge and experience that have been acquired through efforts to develop and implement staff development programs that are more consistent with the theory and philosophy underlying adult education. The resources listed here can be consulted for more information on recent trends in adult literacy staff development.

Print Resources


Reports on the efforts to create a statewide interagency staff development system for Illinois; explains a 5-step needs assessment process involved in implementing the plan.


Rather than the prevailing concept of the adult educator as “facilitator,” the author argues for an emphasis on practical knowledge (or “know-how”) that regards adult educators’ activities as shaped by creativity, reflection, and rationality.


Focuses on professional development approaches, strategies and critical reflection techniques, from the perspective of andragogy rather than pedagogy.


Explores three promising models for supporting the credentialing processing of adult English-as-a-second-language (ESL) teachers and recommends a combination of the three models.


Contains considerations and guidelines essential for an effective, comprehensive staff development and training program; includes information on nontraditional approaches to staff development and training and steps in the transfer of learning.


Based on an earlier study of approaches to training ESL and ABE instructors, this report draws implications and makes recommendations for delivering effective staff development.

Reports on 9 research projects conducted by 12 adult literacy practitioners with Literacy South; the focus of the project was to engage literacy practitioners in self-directed research that generated staff training and development.


Reviews staff development activities instituted as a part of the National Literacy Act of 1991 and argues for the development of more projects based on action research principles. Outlines steps in action research.


Professional development programs for adult literacy and basic education teachers need to address three issues: the practicalities of teaching critical literacy, the means by which teachers advocate for change within their organization, and the kinds of organizations that will best provide teachers with an effective resource base for teaching critical literacy.


Reviews how results-driven education, systems thinking, and constructivism are producing significant changes in how staff development is conceived and implemented.


Both of these volumes contain reports of practitioner research projects that were instituted as a result of Virginia’s inquiry-based staff development efforts.

**Resource Organizations**

Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse for ESL Literacy Education, Center for Applied Linguistics, 1118 22nd Street, NW, Washington, DC 20037-0037; (202) 429-9292, ext. 200. Internet: ncle@cal.org

ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, 1900 Kenny Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1090; (614) 488-4185, ext. 4-7686. Internet: ericacve@magnus.acs.ohio-state.edu

Literacy South, Snow building, Room 202, 331 West Main Street, Durham, VA 22821; (703) 879-2732.

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