

development is, we may be able to find new solutions.

Professional development is often seen as a workshop where a group of people share ideas and learn new ones. Workshops can be very valuable and there is a place within professional development for them. Group sessions may be best for some required training. But what else can professional development be? Thinking about the ways young children learn may help open our eyes to other ways adults learn, too. Let's look at some ways adults can learn from doing.

Ongoing Growing

by Connie Jo Smith

You are excited because the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency has scheduled a well-known speaker for their upcoming Saturday conference. You enthusiastically offer the opportunity for staff members to register and hear complaints that Saturday is the only day they have to spend with their children.

You receive a cash donation to provide training for the center and are exhilarated. You ask for input about the topics and presenters. The session is scheduled for Tuesday evening after the center closes so everyone can attend. Staff members who worked the last shift are tired and hungry. Staff members who opened at 5:00 AM had to drive back to the center and it is getting close to their bedtime.

You schedule a training during the afternoon nap and arrange for volunteers to cover the classrooms. The training is close by so you can be reached. Several regular and competent volunteers show up and are pleased to help, but some volunteers do not show.

You advertised for hiring substitutes for training times. The toll on the budget will be significant and so far not enough people have applied to cover every classroom.

Do you want to provide professional development opportunities for your staff but have found more obstacles than solutions? Many child care programs are experiencing bounteous challenges.

The considerations surrounding training are limitless and sometimes overwhelming. As with every challenge, there are no magical answers; but by expanding our thinking on what professional



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Providing each staff member regularly paid professional development time during working hours shows a commitment to quality. Arranging for part-time staff or well-trained, familiar substitutes to cover is likely to enhance the professional development program. Selecting topics and approaches by balancing individual needs and interests with center requirements and goals will allow individualization and facilitate team spirit.

Learning Center

Design an adult learning center for reading, viewing videos, listening to tapes, using a computer, thinking, and sharing ideas. Use an office for planning, a lounge, or a parent room. Perhaps there is a corner in the kitchen. Areas could be open for other purposes on a scheduled basis.

If space is limited, look for places where magazines, books, videos, audio tapes, and a laptop can be stored and checked out by staff and parents. If no space is available, consider scheduling staff development time at the end of work shifts so staff can go to a public library or home to work.

If you have a professional development work area and materials, examine how frequently and how well they are used. Just as we evaluate children's learning centers, it is important to measure the effectiveness of adult space and materials. Ideas from staff may make the space more comfortable and resources more beneficial.

Resource Review

To extend the use of professional resources, try highlighting a specific article, chapter in a book, videotape, or audio tape. Give assignments to review the material by a designated date. It is important to provide a

method for processing the information. Schedule time for each teacher to discuss their reaction with someone or record their thoughts in a center professional journal. A worksheet developed for everyone to complete and place where they could see each other's ideas is another way to process information. Blank tapes and a recorder can be made available for comments on the assignment.

By focusing all staff on the same information, you give them something in common and facilitate a sense of community. Sharing ideas across shifts enhances communication and relationships with the total staff. If the center is part of a larger program, think about arranging for the sharing to occur across centers.

World Wide Web

A tremendous resource for professional development is the Internet. Providing access to the World Wide Web is one way technology can connect staff to professional development opportunities.

Allot time for staff to research and discover sites. Bookmarking pages that they recommend others visit could be a way to share their discoveries. Specific web addresses might be assigned for review.

Joining a listserv group is an exciting way to share expertise and turn to other professionals for help. (A listserv is an electronic discussion group. People communicate through e-mail about a specific topic, like early childhood. Through a listserv, one can get lesson plan ideas, participate in philosophical debates, find out about conferences, and much more. Information about ERIC sponsored listservs is available at <http://ericece.org/listserv.html>.) The experience of using a computer and learning about the Internet will be professional development in itself.

Distance Education

Other ways technology can support professional development is through distance education. Participating in educational television training programs and registering for correspondence college classes are examples. Another opportunity is interactive distance learning through Early Childhood Professional Development Network (ECPDN) [(803) 799-9887], which offers a variety of satellite early childhood education training courses and resources, with credit options. The National Head Start Association (NHSA) Heads Up! Network provides training through a satellite television network created specifically for the Head Start and early childhood community. See their web page at <http://www.nhsa.org/heads/hnetwork.htm#hnetwork> or call (800) 215-3427 to subscribe.

Visiting Far and Near

People can learn from others within the same center, across town, throughout the state, or beyond. Arranging for staff members to make visits encourages the exchange of information and ideas.

Identify each classroom's strong point and let other staff observe that strength. Another approach is to pair staff and let them visit each other's classroom and give feedback. Still another approach includes encouraging visitation in all classrooms using a prepared observation form to guide the visit toward a non-threatening observation. The form may ask the visitor to identify toys/materials the children used frequently or to note something that they had not seen before.

To identify other sites for visiting, contact your child care resource and referral agency. Your state depart-

ment of education may have model preschool sites identified that would welcome your visit. Some colleges and universities have classrooms open for visitation. A list of NAEYC accredited centers can be obtained by calling (800) 424-2460. The child care licensing office may also have suggestions.

In addition to visiting centers, there are community experiences that could enhance what staff offer children. Visits to art museums, theater productions, and concerts broaden staff experiences. Look around your community to see what may have been overlooked as professional development opportunities.

Mindful Questions and Answers

Great expertise often is right under your roof, but finding time to exchange ideas in an organized approach can be difficult. One way to get ideas flowing and integrate training into the process is to have a place where a question is written and staff members respond throughout a determined time frame. Reading each other's comments keeps communication flowing.

Questions could come from situations where input is needed to make a decision. "What new classroom materials would you like us to buy? Please tell why you want whatever you list." Questions may be ones you want to get staff thinking about. "What is the most important job a preschool teacher does?" Decide how often questions will be changed and who they will come from and inform staff.

Creating a designated place and time for questions makes it systematic. Asking only one question at a time allows the activity to focus all

staff on the issue and encourages more thoughtful answers. Look at your space and see what would work in your center. Again, if you are part of a larger program, explore ways to rotate questions and answers to broaden the experience and encourage program wide connections. This approach may also be helpful in obtaining parent input.

Documentation

As creative approaches to professional development are implemented, creative ways for documentation may also surface. Programs may be required to prove to funding sources and licensing representatives that training has occurred. Look for ways to document all of the terrific learning that is occurring in less traditional styles.