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Recommended Citation

Lawler, Patricia A. and King, Kathleen P. (2000). "Refocusing Faculty Development: The View from an Adult Learning Perspective," *Adult Education Research Conference*. <http://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2000/papers/48>

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Refocusing Faculty Development: The View from an Adult Learning Perspective

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Abstract: *The Adult Learning Model of Faculty Development draws from the research, theory and practice of adult learning and adult education program planning. This new model recognizes faculty as adult learners and faculty development as adult education. It offers strategies for effective initiatives.*

While the field of adult education has influenced many areas of education such as adult literacy, nontraditional college students, distance learning, and corporate training practice, it has not been comprehensively applied to faculty development in higher education. Adult education has successfully aided practitioners in other education settings by encouraging them to think about their students as adult learners and by introducing adult learning theory and practice. This paper discusses the authors' unique model that applies adult learning and adult education program planning principles to higher education faculty development - the *Adult Learning Model of Faculty Development* (Lawler & King, in press). "Refocusing" on faculty development from this perspective has many implications for theory and practice.

Interest in higher education professional development has gone beyond the traditional concepts of sabbaticals and academic discipline conferences and has focused on teaching effectiveness and classroom methodology. Faculty development is now being used to address the challenges facing our institutions in the 21st century, such as changes in student populations, advances in technology, demands for accountability and fiscal austerity (Boice, 1992; Brookfield, 1995; Cranton, 1996; Katz & Henry, 1996; Zuber-Skeritt, 1995). In spite of this increasing attention to faculty development, it is an area of education, which has yet to be informed by adult education theory and practice, especially with respect to how we work with faculty as adult learners. Smylie (1995) noted that when thinking about professional development of teachers the practices are "virtually uninformed by theories of adult

learning and change" (p.93); and Cranton (1996) observed that people who are responsible for instructional and professional development rarely view themselves as educators of adults.

The purpose of this paper is to present and discuss a model for faculty development that views faculty as adult learners and faculty development initiatives as adult education. This model incorporates the literature and research from the fields of adult learning, adult education, program development, and professional development to broaden and inform the perspectives of those responsible for faculty development in post-secondary institutions. Although sparse, recent research and writings on faculty development have shown that using the lens of adult education can be helpful in dealing with faculty development issues and concerns. (Carroll, 1993; King, 1998, 1999; Lawler, DeCosmo & Wilhite, 1996; Lawler & Wilhite, 1997; Wilhite, DeCosmo, & Lawler, 1996) This paper builds on the literature by presenting a model to frame and direct faculty development in higher education from an adult learning perspective.

The Model – Key Elements

The *Adult Learning Model of Faculty Development* was developed to provide those working in faculty development with a formal characterization of the process of faculty development and practical strategies for developing and delivering faculty development initiatives. The conceptual framework relies on a rich historical literature. Recognizing that the purposes and philosophical orientation of different adult education program development models differ, our literature review draws upon common prin-

ciples and practices of how adults learn and the best practices of adult education program development (Brookfield, 1986; Caffarella, 1994; Cervero & Wilson, 1994; Knowles, 1980). The model is grounded in the following adult learning principles: developing a climate of respect, utilizing collaborative modes of inquiry, building on participant experience, learning for action, and cultivating a participative environment (Brookfield, 1986; Cross, 1981, Knowles, 1980, 1989; Lawler, 1991). We also make several assumptions regarding the planning process based on the theories and practices of program development. We see planning as complex and ongoing, a nonlinear process where continuous evaluation can provide opportunities for improved effectiveness. Since planning occurs in a social, political and organizational context, planners need to be aware of the ethical and social responsibilities they have as they work through the fundamental elements needed for effective programming.

This model was developed to expand the repertoire of those working toward effective faculty development on college campuses and it addresses three crucial points that are of concern today. The first concern surrounds the faculty, their characteristics, and motivation to learn and to change. By understanding the dynamic of the faculty's work in their professional roles, the faculty developer will have a better grasp of their needs, concerns and time restraints. Realizing that the faculty are content experts and may even be leaders in their academic discipline is important. The faculty developer who understands this and builds on a foundation of explicit respect for their expertise and experience begins from an adult learning perspective. Utilizing adult learning principles will provide a foundation for developing ownership, motivation and participation in faculty development programs. This begins with identifying faculty learning needs, incorporating their voices in the process and insuring the anticipated goals for change are relevant to the reward systems for faculty, such as tenure, promotion, and merit. The faculty's training as educators and their academic culture are important considerations for the faculty developer who may not be a member of the faculty to understand and respect.

The second concern examines the organizational context and its impact on faculty development initiatives. Faculty development does not occur in a vacuum. The social, political and financial context

of the academic institution has been found to influence the success, not only of programs, but also of effecting change. The climate and structure of the learning organization may either support or hinder learning, and astute faculty developers will learn to "scan" the organizational climate for ways to maximize the impact of their programs in light of their observations and analysis. For instance, if the faculty developer is an administrator never having had a faculty role, there may be resistance from the faculty to their proposals. We propose that in this case, the developer seek support utilizing a faculty committee, reaching out to faculty who are already creating change and creating a collaborative development process. Additionally, the larger context of higher education today is looking closely at faculty, their work and accountability. Historically, faculty development initiatives, which focused on academic research in a discipline, are now being supplemented with workshops, training and programs directed at teaching effectiveness and educational technology. "Faculty, by nature of their profession, are self-directed in their work, independent and autonomous in getting their job done, and collaboratively participate in the policy and governance of the university" (Lawler & King, in press). It is imperative that we view faculty in their professional roles and not just as dependent learners or as employees in a business setting.

The third concern centers on the identity of the faculty developer. In many cases those responsible for faculty development are not such by profession and may not be experts in adult learning, nor program planning. They may come from administration, faculty or outside the university as consultants. Establishing credibility with faculty may become a political process which can inhibit success. Faculty may well be suspicious of administratively assigned faculty developers with little or no knowledge of classroom teaching or the role of the faculty. The *Adult Learning Model of Faculty Development* provides useful information for those both familiar with faculty issues and those new to developing programs. Regardless of the circumstances, faculty developers will benefit from understanding and using adult learning principles to effectively meet the professional development needs of higher education faculty. Characteristics of faculty developers who have such an understanding include: credibility, authenticity, respect, consistency, and responsiveness, along with practical experience and an under-

standing of the dilemmas and issues the faculty face in their everyday work (Brookfield, 1995).

The Model – Stages & Tasks

Based on our experience, research and understanding of the principles of adult learning and program planning, we have developed an inclusive conceptual model that provides a practical framework in which the developer can work. There are four stages to the model: Preplanning, Planning, Delivery, and Follow-up. Each stage requires that we ask specific questions and recommends tasks to be completed. The principles of respect, collaboration, experience, action and participation are integrated in each stage.

Preplanning

As the beginning point for effective faculty development, this stage focuses attention on organizational goals, needs and climate, as well as starting with the faculty and their needs and experience. The questions to be asked in this stage include: What is the purpose of faculty development? What is the purpose of this specific faculty development initiative? How is faculty development tied to the mission of the institution? And what resources are available to support a faculty development initiative at this time? Asking these questions aids the developer in a reflective process that includes scanning the environment and the social and political context in which the programs will take place. There are five Preplanning tasks: understanding organizational culture, identifying the role of the faculty developer, assessing needs, evaluating resources, and establishing goals. During this stage, the adult learning perspective means we must consider the faculty's needs for learning and change, not just what we or the institution perceives as important. Here is where an advisory committee of faculty for faculty development may be helpful, not only in understanding the institutions, but also in collecting information on faculty needs. This is also the time to have a clear idea of both financial, physical and human resources.

Planning

While preplanning determined the overall direction of faculty development, the Planning Stage involves structured preparation for what specifically will happen during the program. Important questions to

be addressed include what exactly is to happen, who will be involved and how will it all be organized. This Planning Stage is the time for both the faculty developer and the administration to build a positive climate in which the faculty will be strengthened and empowered. While much training is viewed as fixing something that is deficient, this model emphasizes a more positive approach by including the faculty in the entire process and valuing their input. There are six tasks for the Planning Stage and they include: selecting a topic, identifying a presenter, preparing for delivery, preparing for support and transfer of learning, scheduling the event and beginning the evaluation. Coming from a learned-centered perspective requires us to take into consideration the needs, interests, experiences and capabilities of the faculty who will be our potential participants. Building ownership increases motivation first to attend the event, and then to transfer the learning from the event to faculty work. Probably one of the most crucial tasks in the whole model is the selection of the presenter. Not only should the person be an expert in the content to be delivered, but the presenter should also understand the characteristics of the faculty participants and be able to present using appropriate and respectful instructional methods. If the faculty feel comfortable with the delivery of the program, then transfer of learning is apt to occur.

Delivery

Successful programs breed more successful programs. If faculty find that the program meets their needs, is tied to their reward systems, has meaning for their work and is delivered in a professional and appropriate way, they are more likely to be positive towards faculty development and change. This is why preplanning and planning tasks are important to complete before the program actually is considered. The first question we must ask ourselves is: Are we building on this preparation? Other questions include: How do we effectively promote the program? How are adult learning principles implemented? And how do we monitor the program? These questions delineate our tasks at this stage. First, in the rush to get things done we may lose sight of the overall goals, objectives and direction that were originally considered. Building on our preparation means utilizing all needs assessment, faculty input, and environmental scanning informa-

tion. Other tasks at this stage include: promoting the program, implementing adult learning principles and monitoring the program. Marketing programs on campus may require a different perspective. Timing of the materials, channels of communication and clarity on goals and expectations are important. The opportunities available for the promotion of the program might well be a measure of the level of organizational support. When promoting the program, faculty should be made aware of how the program will be delivered. Will it be lecture, hands-on, experiential, and/or participatory? Here is the opportunity to integrate all the adult learning principles in the actual program. Both the content and process should be relevant for the faculty, emphasizing practical applications and connections to their work. Being aware of diverse learning styles, faculty discipline specific characteristics and faculty work constraints are important to this stage.

Follow-up

Many of us think we are done when the program ends. However, with faculty development we are continually striving for more effective programming to create of climate of professional development that goes beyond the traditional modes of sabbaticals and conferences. Support for changes in thinking and behavior, along with consideration of further development activities is important at this point. Here we ask the following questions: What is the evaluation plan? How will ongoing support be provided for what was learned? What can we, as faculty developers, gain from reflecting on our role in this endeavor? The adult learning principles inherent in this stage center on the goal of empowering the faculty in their work. If we build a climate of respect and provide opportunities for collaboration and participation we enhance the possibility that learning will take place. Implementing what is learned empowers faculty and helps them to make the changes necessary to advance in their professional roles. The tasks at this stage are evaluation, continued learning, and assessment of the faculty developer's role. We encourage developers to use more than one method of evaluation to get an overall picture of not only the feelings of the faculty regarding the event, but exactly what they have learned and how they can transfer that learning to their work. Analyzing the data and reflecting on

what it means provides not only feed back on the program but begins the needs assessment process for the continuation of development activities within the institution. Learning does not end at the close of a seminar or workshop. Interest in the faculty's continued learning promotes a positive climate and promotes ownership and interest in future initiatives. Finally, we come to our role as a developer. Just as we ask the participants to reflect on the event and learning they attended, we too need to reflect on the entire process and the outcomes of our planning. Such reflective practice will enable the developer to offer ever-improving faculty development programs.

Summary

The impact of adult learning, adult education, program development, and professional development principles upon informed practice can lead to programs that meet the changing needs of faculty and their institutions. The *Adult Learning Model of Faculty Development* provides an organized and strategic framework to focus faculty developers in the field from an adult learning perspective.

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