

Job-embedded Professional Development

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Definition

Job-embedded Professional development is learning that occurs as educators engage in their daily work activities. It can be both formal and informal and includes but is not limited to discussion with others, peer coaching, mentoring, study groups and action research.

Brief History

Job-embedded professional or staff development comes from research on effective staff development. While the concept of job-embedded staff development is not new, recognizing what it is and utilizing job-embedded methods is relatively new. Sparks (1994) calls for a paradigm shift in staff development. A shift that will improve staff development which is usually “educators sitting relatively passively while an “expert” “exposed” them to new ideas or “trained” them in new practices” (Sparks, 1994, p. 26). Most research on instructional improvements has indicated that staff development consisting of a single session is ineffective (Sparks, G.M., 1983).

Improved models of staff development, including job-embedded development, come from research on the adult learning, the brain, and from the constructivist pedagogy. Malcolm Knowles (1973) in *The Adult Learner: A neglected Species* makes four assumptions about adult learners.

- 1- Adults learn best when self-directed.
- 2- They use past experiences to understand new information.
- 3- They are ready to learn new information when it important to them.
- 4- Adults are problem-centered learners, they want to apply new information to their immediate circumstances.

Job-embedded staff development considers and addresses these assumptions.

In addition to adult learning job-embedded staff development uses neuroscientific information. Wolfe (2001) defines learning as a filtering of information to

determine relevance to the learner.

Neuroscientists explain the physiological structures activated as we learn. There are many ways brain research can be applied to staff-development. One includes building new neural pathways. The brain (including the adult brain) continually develops connecting neurons among different parts of the brain. These form when new information is connected to previously learned information. A way to make neural connections stronger is to clearly link current information to previously learned information. Job-embedded staff development like planning lessons collaboratively can make neural connections stronger (Nevills, 2003).

Constructivists believe that learners build and construct knowledge. Knowledge is built in the mind of the learner. In the constructivist pedagogy students are guided, and teachers model appropriate behavior and provide multiple examples instead of direct teaching. Since constructivist teaching is effective its tenets should also be applied to staff development. “Staff development from a constructivist perspective will include activities such as action research, conversations with peers about beliefs and assumptions, that guide their instruction, and reflective practices...”(Sparks, 1994, p. 27). Constructivist staff-development can be considered job-embedded because it occurs during the daily activities of educators.

Central Issues

The goals of job-embedded development are like the goals of effective staff development.

- Increase student achievement
- Refine existing instructional strategies.
- Introduce new instructional strategies.

However, job-embedded staff development meets these goals by incorporating the training into the workday. Job-embedded staff development should encourage educators to view daily experiences as opportunities to

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learn. This learning by doing must be on a conscious level so it can verbalized and controlled. This occurs when educators take time to reflect on experiences to find the learning embedded within (Wood & McQuarrie, 1999). Successful job-embedded staff development requires principals to see themselves as leaders of learning and as designers of structures that support high levels of learning by being the facilitator of adult learning (Sparks, 1997).

Leading Scholars

Dennis Sparks and Fred Wood as well as others have written about job-embedded staff development specifically. However, any staff development model that engages educators in collaboration about how to improve is considered job-embedded. Therefore, scholars and research in the areas of peer coaching, mentoring, reflective practices and action research are beneficial to implementing job-embedded development.

Resources

- www.ascd.org
- Journal of Staff Development volume 16 (Summer 1995) features articles on job-embedded development.

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