

# How Teachers Change: Implications for Supporting Student Success in Adult Education

Presentation by Cristine Smith

Deputy Director of

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

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# Professional Development Study Design

- ◆ Two reports, both available at <http://ncsall.gse.harvard.edu>
  - How Teachers Change: A Study of Professional Development in Adult Education
  - Characteristics and Concerns of Adult Basic Education Teachers

# Objectives

- ◆ Review findings of professional development study on how teachers change
- ◆ Review findings of study about teacher characteristics, concerns and working conditions
- ◆ Discuss what these findings mean for practice, policy and further research.

# Teachers and student success

What makes teachers such a strong predictor of student success?

- ◆ Individual teacher characteristics?  
(experience, certification, subject matter knowledge)
- ◆ Instructional approaches that work?
- ◆ Alignment of standards, curriculum, accountability?

# Paradigms of Professional Development

<b>Traditional</b>	Develop teachers' skills cumulatively (competencies, approaches & techniques)	Workshops, training, peer coaching
<b>Job-embedded</b>	Solve problems of student learning	Study circle, practitioner research, mentoring
<b>Standards-based</b>	Train teachers to use curriculum aligned with content standards & accountability	Training with follow-up on site

# NCSALL Professional Development Study: How Teachers Change

## Our research question:

- ◆ How do teachers change as a result of participating in one of three different models of professional development:
  - ❖ multi-session workshop,
  - ❖ mentor teacher group, or
  - ❖ practitioner research group, and
- ◆ What are the most important factors (individual, professional development, program and system) that influence—support or hinder—that change?

# How Teachers Change: Study Methodology

- ◆ 100 teachers from Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts participated in professional development we designed: 1998-2000
- ◆ Each state offered one multi-session workshop, two mentor teacher groups, two practitioner research groups
- ◆ Each professional development model offered 18 hours of professional development on the same topic: learner motivation, retention and persistence

# How Teachers Change: What is Change?

- ◆ **Differences in thinking and acting on and off the topic**
  - On the topic: Learning more about the topic and taking action to address in classroom, in program, or in field
  - Off the topic: Increased awareness of field, increased confidence in teaching, decreased isolation, using a new teaching technique
  
- ◆ **Two measures of change:**
  - ❖ Overall amount of change (thinking and acting on and off the topic)
  - ❖ Type of change (thinking and acting on the topic of learner persistence)

# How Teachers Change: Professional Development Models

- ◆ **Multi-session workshop:**
  - ❖ 16 teachers participate, lead by a facilitator
  - ❖ Three 6-hour sessions, with tasks in between sessions
  - ❖ Span of 1-3 months
- ◆ **Mentor teacher group:**
  - ❖ 5 teachers participate, lead by an experienced mentor teacher
  - ❖ Four 2-3 hour group meetings, with two individual mentor observations of each teacher's class
  - ❖ Span of 4-6 months
- ◆ **Practitioner research group:**
  - ❖ 7 teachers participate, lead by a facilitator
  - ❖ Six 3-hour sessions; teachers conduct classroom research between sessions
  - ❖ Span of 5-7 months

# How Teachers Change: Study Methodology

## ◆ Quantitative data:

- 100 teachers
- Questionnaire administered before, after and one year after participating in professional development

## ◆ Qualitative data:

- 18 teachers, across groups and across states, selected randomly for subsample;
- interviewed before, after, one year after participating,
- plus site visit, classroom observation, and interview with program director

# How Teachers Change: Teachers in Our Sample...

- ◆ 83% were female
- ◆ 92% were white
- ◆ 67% were 41-60 years of age
- ◆ 49% had master's degree or above
- ◆ 52% from urban programs
- ◆ 53% from LEAs, 27% from CBOs
- ◆ 60% from programs with 5-20 staff

# How Teachers Change: Teachers in Our Sample...

- ◆ 24% full-time (35+ hours a week in ABE); average hours worked in ABE per week was 23.5
- ◆ 33% had taught in ABE for less than two years
- ◆ 27% were GED teachers, 25% were ESOL teachers, 23% taught an equal combination of ABE/pre-GED/GED
- ◆ 54% received prep time
- ◆ 48% received benefits in their ABE job

# How Teachers Change: Teachers in Our Sample...

- ◆ 53% had not completed any formal coursework related to adult education or ESOL
- ◆ Only 20% had completed more than three courses.
- ◆ 65% had, at some point, taught in K-12
- ◆ 30% taught in ABE as their first teaching experience
- ◆ 10% were also teaching concurrently in K-12

# How Teachers Change: Participation in the Professional Development

- ◆ Practitioner research or mentor teacher groups had more experienced teachers; more new teachers in workshops.
- ◆ 16 out of the original 100 participants left the NCSALL professional development before completing 2/3 (or 12 hours); significant difference between 3 models
  - ❖ Workshop dropouts = 0 out of 35
  - ❖ Mentor teacher dropouts = 4 out of 28 (14%)
  - ❖ Practitioner research dropout = 12 out of 37 (38%).

# How Teachers Change: How Much Teachers Changed

- ◆ Almost all (90%) gained some knowledge on the topic, but for some it was only a concept or two
- ◆ 78% took some action, on or off the topic, but for some it was very minimal (e.g., called absent learners a few times)
- ◆ Four Types of Change: (for completers, n=83)
  1. No or Minimal Change: 28%
  2. Thinking Change: 35%
  3. Acting Change: 13%
  4. "Integrated" Change: 24%

# How Teachers Change: Key Individual Factors that Influenced Change

- ◆ **Reason for attending professional development:** those with a strong need to learn, either on the topic or about good teaching and student success, changed more.
- ◆ **First teaching:** those who began teaching career in ABE (not K-12) changed more
- ◆ **Years of experience in the field:** those with fewer years of experience changed more
- ◆ **Level of education:** those with master's degrees and above less likely to change on the topic

# How Teachers Change: Key Professional Development Factors that Influenced Change

## Most important professional development factors:

- ◆ **Hours of NCSALL professional development attended:** more hours, more change
- ◆ **Rated quality of professional development** (as rated by researchers): higher quality, more change. Higher quality groups had good facilitation, good group dynamics, and good model with flexibility to adapt to needs of group
- ◆ **Perceived quality of professional development** (as rated by teachers): higher rating, more change

# How Teachers Change: **Key Professional Development Factors that Influenced Change**

## **Somewhat important professional development factors:**

- ◆ Type of professional development model (workshop, mentor teacher group, practitioner research group)
- ◆ “Co-participation” in professional development with others from one’s program

# How Teachers Change: Influence of Professional Development Model

- ◆ **Type** of professional development model (workshop, mentor teacher group, practitioner research group) was not as important as other factors
- ◆ Teachers who participated in **practitioner research groups** demonstrated **slightly more change overall** (increased awareness of the field, a greater appreciation for learning with other teachers, and knowledge of research)
- ◆ Teachers who participated in **mentor teacher groups** seemed to learn and do more to address learner persistence, and **slightly more teachers who participated in this model put learning and action together in an integrated and substantial way.**

# How Teachers Change: Key Program/System Factors that Influenced Change

## Most important program/system factors:

- ◆ **Access to benefits:** those who received benefits through ABE job were more likely to change
- ◆ **Program situation:** those who worked in programs that were not already taking action to address learner persistence AND where teachers had a voice in decision-making
- ◆ **Access to prep time:** those who received paid prep time were more likely to change

# How Teachers Change: Key Program/System Factors that Influenced Change

## Somewhat important program/system factors:

- ◆ **Number of working hours in ABE:** those who worked more hours were more likely to change
- ◆ **No required curriculum:** those with freedom to make changes in goals, content, materials or activities were more likely to change (GED teachers who taught to the test less likely to take action on this topic)
- ◆ **Amount of paid professional development release time:** those with more paid hours annually were more likely to change
- ◆ **Opportunities for collegiality among teachers:** those with more opportunities to meet and share with other teachers in program were more likely to change

# How Teachers Change: Recommendations for Professional Developers

- ◆ Ensure that professional development is of high quality.
- ◆ Offer a variety of PD models for teachers to attend, including program-based PD.
- ◆ Helps teachers acquire skills to build theories of good teaching and student success.
- ◆ Add activities to each PD session to help teachers strategize how to deal with the forces that affect their ability to take action.

# How Teachers Change: Recommendations for Program Directors and States

- ◆ Improve teachers' working conditions, including access to decision making in the program.
- ◆ Pay teachers to attend professional development.
- ◆ Increase access to colleagues and directors during and after professional development.
- ◆ Establish expectations at the state and the program level that all teachers must continue to learn.

# Characteristics and Concerns: Who are adult basic education teachers?

- ◆ ABE teachers:
  - Do not follow a career path into adult basic education
  - Have limited formal preparation geared specifically to teaching adults
  - Have limited opportunities for professional development
  - (A significant portion) do not stay in the field for long
  - Typically play a limited role in the broader field of ABE.

# Characteristics and Concerns: What challenges do they face?

- ◆ Teaching challenges include:
  - Developing curriculum
  - Organizing instruction
  - Assessing Students' Progress
- ◆ Teachers' top concerns about their jobs relate to **their program** (structure and mission, facilities and administrative support) and **working conditions** (salary, security, benefits and # of working hours)

# Characteristics and Concerns: What challenges do teachers face?

- ◆ Teachers are strongly influenced by their working conditions, defined as:
  - Access to resources
  - Access to professional development and information
  - Access to colleagues and director
  - Access to decision-making
  - Access to a well-supported job (a living wage, benefits, more working hours, job security, paid prep time, and paid professional development release time)

# Characteristics and Concerns: How Do Teachers Respond to Challenges?

- ◆ Cope
- ◆ Challenge
- ◆ Leave

The main reasons given for why they would leave the field were low salary, lack of benefits, limited working hours, job security

# Characteristics and Concerns: Recommendations

- ◆ Fund research on the connection between teacher preparation, working conditions, teacher retention and student achievement
- ◆ Specifically, is connection between teachers and student success in adult education related to:
  - Individual teacher characteristics? (years of experience, certification, pedagogical or subject matter knowledge)
  - Program or system characteristics? (prep time, working hours, working conditions)
  - Instructional approach used? (e.g., the Star Project toolkit, Wilson, etc.)
  - Alignment of content standards with curriculum and testing?

# Characteristics and Concerns: Recommendations

- ◆ We need to know: what are the costs and benefits of investing more heavily in teacher preparation and support? If more money came into the adult education field, how should states and programs spend it?
- ◆ In the meantime, advocate and plan for improved teacher preparation and working conditions