

A Model for Professional Development

"Experience is the adult learner's textbook"
— Edward Lindeman, 1926.

BASCOM Professional Development begins with the assumption that the educators are professionals who bring vast knowledge and experience to each workshop. The foundation of BASCOM Professional Development is Malcolm Knowles' "Six Core Adult Learning Principles." Treating adults as adult learners is the source of the program's success.

Criteria for Staff Developers

Staff developer recruitment, a key priority for BASCOM, involves highly selective criteria. All BASCOM staff developers are certified teachers that have both classroom experience and a background in instructional technology and teacher professional development. Having "been there," these staff developers integrate the knowledge and experience of participants into the workshops whenever possible (Knowles, 1998).

BASCOM staff developers arrive with a carefully crafted curriculum, designed by experts in contemporary adult learning theory. BASCOM staff developers are trained in the use of this curriculum and engage in a period of apprenticeship with an experienced staff developer before conducting any workshops alone. Each workshop follows a similar four activity design intended to engage them as adult learners. Activities One and Four are periods of professional dialogue and reflection. Activities Two and Three are the instructional components where participants take part in hands-on activities directed toward a practical product to be used in his or her organization.

Development Models Adult Learning

One of the most important factors in teaching adults is establishing their "need to know" (Knowles, 1998). BASCOM Professional Development addresses this factor by beginning each workshop with a period of reflection and problem solving. During this period, workshop participants are presented with a guiding question.

Each participant reflects on the question either alone or with a partner and jots down thoughts in a space provided in their workbooks. The BASCOM staff developer acts as group facilitator, encouraging participants to share their thoughts on the topic. In this discussion, workshop participants share their professional experience, especially noting the gap between how things are and how they would like it to be (Knowles, 1998). At this point, the staff developer injects how the content and skills presented in the workshop will address that gap.

Activities Reflect Real World Contexts

Another key component of BASCOM Professional Development is setting the instructional activities into the participants' real world contexts (Knowles, 1998), culminating with a hands-on interaction with the content and skills presented. In fact, during each instructional activity, the participants develop a product ready to use with their students as soon as the workshop is over. While all instructional activities consist of the staff developer modeling the skills and each participant practicing these during a brief period of guided practice, the bulk of the activities involve the participant directing his or her own learning within a context that is self-directed (Knowles, 1998), tailoring the skills to their particular grade, content area, or specialty.

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The final activity encourages the participant to evaluate what he or she has learned. Participants share how the content and skills acquired will work in their organizations and how they will not. All workshops address issues of student progress and achievement in Activity Four. Each participant articulates how he or she will insure that students are learning once the content of the workshop is put into practice. During this period of reflection, participants are also challenged to coalesce the new knowledge with established pedagogical practice, recognizing that the participant is the experienced teacher who will bring the knowledge back into real classrooms.

Model Reinforces Previous Skills

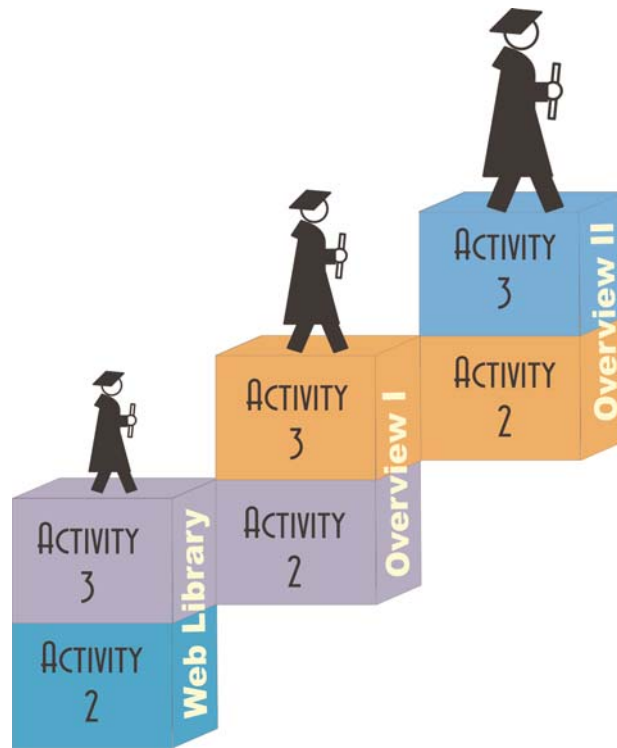
Each workshop is part of a carefully crafted scope and sequence. Activity Two and Activity Three of each workshop complement previously attended workshops.

For example, Activity Two of "Using the Lesson Creator for Student Achievement II" is designed to reinforce the knowledge and skills learned in Activity Three of "Using the Lesson Creator for Student Achievement I." Therefore, before beginning any new material, participants have an opportunity to reinforce old material and make sure they grasp basic concepts before moving forward. This flexibility allows a level of individualization for participants of diverse technological skill. Those who are more technologically savvy can begin at a higher level, eliminating the frustration of sitting through material they may have learned years ago. However, novices to instructional technology are given the opportunity to learn basic technology competencies within the context of a teaching and learning application—adding to the "life skills and the acquisition of coping skills" (Knowles, 1998) essential for the practice of education in the 21st century. Yet, due to the scope and sequence, all can achieve the appropriate benchmarks required by their individual professional development plans toward the use of technology for content instruction.

The start and end points of all BASCOM Professional Development is student achievement. BASCOM offers specialized workshops for those charged with leading organizational change and curricular reform. These workshops, while focusing on similar content and skills presented to teachers, situate the learning into the context of curriculum leadership—curriculum

mapping and articulation, instructional support, teacher supervision, and assessment design. BASCOM Professional Development for Administrators and Supervisors asks these educators to answer the question as to how all this technology fits into the "big picture," especially in regards to insuring student achievement.

Malcom Knowles noted that adults are primarily motivated to learn through an innate desire to grow even though that motivation may be hampered by significant barriers (Knowles, 1998). BASCOM Professional Development reduces many of the barriers associated with technological learning by creating true professional development opportunities that respect the experience of the participants while challenging them to greater levels of technological integration toward advancing to higher levels of student achievement.



References

Knowles, Malcolm S., Elwood F. Holton III, and Richard A. Swanson. (1998). *The Adult Learner*. Houston: Gulf Publishing.

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