II. Information for Trainers

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Qualities of a Successful Trainer

The individuals who train teachers of adult English language learners are often teachers themselves. This is often effective because trainers need to be able to understand the classroom of adult learners of English as a second language (ESL) and the challenges and opportunities that teachers face. Many of the qualities of good teaching are also the qualities of good training. Below is a list of 10 characteristics of good teaching that are also characteristics of good training.

1. Clear goals and objectives.

Teachers have clear goals for classes and objectives that will enable students to reach these goals. These objectives can be seen in the design of lessons and their activities. For example, if a teacher's objective is that students will be able to describe physical symptoms of a sickness to health care personnel, then the activities in the lesson will be designed to teach students "sickness vocabulary" and give them practice using it. The lesson may also include grammar for describing physical symptoms, such as the use of the verb "have" as in "I have _______ (a cold, a fever, a sore back)."

Teachers who are able to organize class lessons and their activities to meet objectives and goals will probably carry this skill into training. This skill is vital for good training, because during a training session a great deal must be accomplished in a short time. If trainers cannot focus participants on what is relevant to accomplish to fulfill the training objectives, then opportunities for learning may be lost. For example, one of the objectives in *The CAELA Guide for Adult ESL Trainers* workshop module on Effective Lesson Planning for Adult English Language Learners is that participants will be able to "develop activities for each stage of a lesson." Several of the activities in the training focus on learning the stages of a lesson and then developing activities for each of the stages. Trainers using this workshop module need to keep this objective, the stages of a lesson, in focus while doing these activities and not get side-tracked on the content of the lessons.

2. Current content knowledge of ESL theories and methodologies.

Similar to a teacher of adult English language learners, it is not sufficient for a trainer to have experience working only with adult learners who are English speakers, because English language learners represent a different set of opportunities and challenges than native-English-speaking students do. Trainers of ESL teachers need to understand second language acquisition and effective methodologies for working with adults learning English in the classroom. For example, a trainer should know the advantages of project-based learning for second language acquisition well enough to be able to give training participants specific suggestions about how to use project-based learning with their classes: What projects would be appropriate for a specific level of adult English language learners, what grammar and vocabulary can be taught with a specific project topic, and what writing and presentation strategies will be appropriate for a specific level of learners.

3. Needs assessments.

Good teachers conduct needs assessments with adult English language learners to ensure that the class meets their needs and goals. Teachers understand the importance of tailoring the curriculum to meet the specific needs that learners bring to class and, by doing so, make the course relevant to learners. For example, if learners need to pass their written drivers' license test, the teacher uses information from the drivers' education manual to teach grammar points (e.g., commands) and language functions (e.g., the procedure to follow if a car breaks down along an interstate highway).

Learners themselves may also be involved in setting the curriculum so that their course is relevant to them. The teacher regularly makes adjustments as new student needs become known and updates class plans to reflect these (Weddel & Van Duzer, 1997).

Trainers who assess participants' needs are more likely to be effective (Eitington, 2001). Often participants come to a training wanting to learn specific information or to try new activities in their classrooms. If a trainer is not aware of participants' needs and hopes for the training, then the training will not be as useful to participants as it might have been. Granted, there is a curriculum that must be followed in a training, but this curriculum should be tailored to the participants' needs and wishes as much as possible so that the training will be relevant. Trainers can also conduct brief needs assessments periodically during a training to learn what is relevant to participants and to ensure that participants are receiving the information and material that they need. In some cases, participants may already be familiar with the information, activities, or techniques being covered, so it would be counterintuitive and counterproductive to continue to present this part of the workshop.

4. An informed understanding of the adult learner.

Adults learn best in ways that value their life experiences (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). In his *Train the Trainers Manual*, Siebenhuhner (2002) lists five basic principles of training adult educators:

1. Adults have a unique identity. They have a "cognitive map" made up of their lives, education, and experiences so far. During training, they will try to fit the training information into their cognitive map, so a trainer must be able to treat adult participants as unique individuals and give them opportunities to relate new ideas and experiences to what they already know and have experienced.

2. Adults are not empty vessels. Participants come to the training with a wealth of their own experiences, and a trainer needs to integrate new knowledge and skills with the knowledge and skills that teachers have. A variety of factors play a role in participants' learning, and the trainer needs to be aware of these. They include participants' motivation or lack of motivation, the training atmosphere, the training methods, and the trainer's capability to guide the learning process.

3. Adults are not school children. They do not need a trainer to tell them what to do; they are very self-directed in their learning and like to learn from others in the training as well as the trainer. Because of this, a trainer should be able to listen to participants carefully and respectfully and structure opportunities during the training for participants to share their own experiences and learn from others in pairs and small groups.

4. Adults learn through experiences. They learn more by doing than by listening to a lecture. Because of this, a trainer should use participatory training methods.

These characteristics of the adult learner make it important that a trainer know how to work with adults. Trainers should be able to develop knowledge and skills through participant activities and interaction rather than through lecture. They can use experiential, participatory training. A good trainer needs to see education as facilitating participants' acquisition of knowledge and skills. For example, when giving a training about multilevel lesson planning, a trainer should ask participants what experiences, successes, and challenges they have had with planning and delivering lessons in multilevel classes. A trainer who does this will make the training more relevant to and appropriate for the participants.

5. Task-based teaching techniques.

Since adults learn through experiences (Siebenhuhner, 2002), task-based learning is a natural way for adults to learn, both as students in a classroom and as participants in a training. Moss and Ross-Feldman (2003, p. 2) define task-based learning as providing "learners with opportunities for learner-to-learner interactions that encourage authentic use of language and meaningful communication." If a teacher provides learners with tasks through which they can interact, they learn language in an authentic, meaningful way. Similarly, if a trainer can provide participants with tasks that allow them to talk about their own experience and relate new information and materials to their experiences, then their learning will be relevant to their situations and meaningful to them. For example, in the Effective Lesson Planning for Adult English Language Learners workshop module, training participants are asked to work together in small groups to plan a lesson for a multilevel class. The activity prompts participants about what to include in their lesson plans and gives them scope to design a lesson for a specific class they are teaching. It also gives them the opportunity to talk together and learn from each other as they decide what to include in their lesson plans.

6. Articulate and clear.

A trainer makes new ideas and concepts clear. This includes the ability to break complicated ideas and processes down into smaller parts and the ability to use simple, straightforward language. The most important goal for the trainer is that the participants understand the content of the training, not that the trainer sounds learned and erudite. For example, when a trainer is conducting a training on a standardized test and participants do not understand a grammar point that students are being assessed on, such as subordination, the trainer can teach subordination indirectly through examples. In this way, the concept is taught without the trainer talking down to the participants.

This technique not only shows respect for participants but also creates an atmosphere in which participants will be more likely to ask questions when they do not understand something.

Even very articulate trainers may need to use visuals to make a concept or idea clear. In fact, it is generally necessary to use visuals, as some participants may be visual learners. Visuals may include illustrations, charts, realia, maps, and PowerPoint slides.

7. Well organized and able to keep to a schedule.

Trainers organize themselves, their materials, handouts, space, and time to help keep participants (and themselves) focused on what the session is about, what is happening, and where it is going (Eitington, 2001). Clear objectives and a posted agenda help accomplish this. Sometimes trainers create the training plan and schedule themselves, and sometimes they use prepared workshop modules. Whatever type of plan they use, trainers need to stay with the plan, complete the activities and material in the plan, and finish on time. A major difference between training and teaching is the allocation of time. When teaching, the teacher has the next class to finish up activities; when training, the trainer usually does not have another session with a particular group of participants. So a trainer needs to guide people through activities, hold some questions until break time or through the use of a parking lot (a running list of questions to answer at a later time in the training), and adapt materials and the schedule in light of time constraints.

That said, trainers must also be flexible and sensitive to “the teaching moment.” If participants need more practice or a more complete explanation to understand a concept, then the trainer spends more time in this area and is able to rearrange and juggle other elements in the schedule while making sure that new content is understood. This skill—being sensitive to the teachable moment and juggling content—is very important in training, where information may be new to participants and time is limited.

8. Quick rapport with people, friendly.

Good teachers are able to communicate with learners from diverse cultures with differing linguistic and educational backgrounds. Similarly, a good trainer has a “presence” and is able to field questions and make decisions about changes to the schedule with poise (see #7 above). A good trainer will not get flustered when participants ask difficult questions but will answer them with respect for the questioner. If changes need to be made in the training schedule, an effective trainer is able to understand and respond to participants’ needs, think on her feet, and make a decision. She can prioritize the most important activities that need to be finished and find ways to get the most important information across, even if not all activities can be accomplished in the allotted time.

In this respect, training is often thought of more as an art than a science, because it is difficult to characterize this quality in a trainer and teach a trainer to develop a relationship with participants. All trainers have their individual ways of doing this. Many rely on humor, an understanding of “where participants are coming from,” or an ability to bring their own experiences to bear on the training material. For example, when giving a training about workplace literacy skills, a trainer who has experience teaching English to hotel employees or transportation employees will be able to use those experiences to make the training materials come alive for participants.

9. Effective questioning techniques.

A good teacher is able to help students understand a question and can rephrase a question so that students can answer it. This implies a lot of student involvement in whole-class discussion, rather than a lot of lecturing. If a teacher teaches through questioning, then students are more actively involved in the discussion (Christensen, 1991; Schaetzel, 2004). Likewise, if a trainer gives information through questioning participants, or intersperses questions with giving information, this involves participants in the learning and helps participants to take new information and make sense of it with what they already know.

If participants do not understand a question that a trainer asks, the trainer needs to be able to rephrase it in a way that is more understandable. This might include giving an example, using different vocabulary, or breaking a long question down into shorter, more simple questions. For example, in the Teaching Reading to Adult English Language Learners workshop module, participants are asked to agree or disagree with the statement "Guessing words from context is an excellent strategy for learning second language vocabulary." If participants do not know what it means to guess words from context, the trainer can give them some examples of doing this.

A good trainer also uses content-focused questions (e.g., What two different ways can this activity in the lesson plan be done, one for a beginning-level student and one for an intermediate-level student?) to ascertain how well participants understand the material, rather than a global "Do you understand?" Participants often respond to global questions in the affirmative, even when they do not understand.

When teaching, it is also important to ask appropriate and nonthreatening questions of students during pair and group work to make those activities more productive. This skill can be used to frame good questions to make these tasks relevant to participants' lives.

10. A team player.

Some trainers may have an individually engaging style and are able to bring this style to bear while fulfilling the training's objectives and goals. But trainers who rely on their individual style and alter the planned training materials and curriculum risk deleting valuable pieces of information, and this may detract from the quality of the training rather than enhance it. For example, if a state department of education wants all teachers of adult English language learners trained using *The CAELA Guide's* workshop module on Teaching Reading to Adult English Language Learners, all of the trainers doing this training should follow it as it is written. If one trainer decides to skip part of this training and do activities on lesson planning instead, because that is what the trainer believes participants need, then the participants attending that training will not have the same knowledge base as the others in the state.

Some trainers may be asked to cotrain with another person. There are many benefits to cotraining, especially if a training session has many participants. Cotrainers can give participants more individual attention and keep their finger on the pulse of the group (what they understand and what they are having trouble with) more accurately than one individual trainer working with a large group.

Effective teaching and training have many commonalities. These 10 qualities of effective teachers and trainers can be used for self-reflection if a teacher is trying to decide if she wants to become a trainer. They can also be used by administrators who are selecting teachers to become trainers.

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Training Tips

When organizing training, a trainer needs to give thorough attention to a number of issues to ensure that the training is well planned and capably delivered. What follows are suggestions to help make training interesting and successful.

Before the Training

The preparation that a trainer does before the training is invaluable for making the training coherent, engaging, and appropriate for the audience. Pretraining preparation includes more than making a schedule for the training. A trainer needs to think carefully about the audience, the content to be covered, the materials to be used, the presentation format, and the sequencing of the session. If possible, a trainer should conduct a needs assessment of the participants prior to the training to know their familiarity with the topic and their specific questions about it. If there are state or program initiatives regarding the topic, then the trainer should tailor the training to those initiatives to make it more meaningful to the participants. If a needs assessment cannot be conducted prior to the training, the trainer should interview the administrator who arranged the training to know specifically why this training is being offered and what state or program goals this training is meant to fulfill. (A sample of a teacher needs assessment that can be used with teachers in a state or program is found at the end of this section.) The trainer can also do a quick, informal needs assessment of participants at the beginning of the training, asking two or three questions to see what participants already know and what they would like to take away from the training.

If a trainer would like to gain more expertise before giving a training, the trainer can arrange to observe a more experienced trainer. This will help a new trainer to see how an expert trainer interacts with and responds to participants. A Training Observation Form for watching an expert trainer and making notes is located at the end of this section.

Review the material in light of the audience:

While reviewing the materials carefully before trainings, trainers should be able to assess the content with their audience in mind. What areas might this audience know already, and what areas might be new to them? Because adults are purposeful in their learning, it is important that trainers ascertain what aspects of the materials will be most important to a particular audience and make those concepts and ideas prominent. To do this, ask questions of the person arranging the training or ask this person to conduct a short survey of the participants. A training that gives people what they already know will waste their time, and participants may quickly lose interest. It is best if a trainer knows which parts of the training will be most appropriate for a particular audience and tailors the training accordingly.

Decide on a presentation style:

There are many different ways to present material in a training session. A trainer needs to plan in advance how a particular audience might best learn the material and take into consideration the different learning styles that may be represented in the audience (Gardner, 1983). Different people learn in different ways: some teachers learn a new teaching strategy best by watching it demonstrated to them; others learn best by reading about it and trying it out in their own classrooms; still others learn best by discussing the new strategy and then trying it out during the training in a role play. An effective training session uses a variety of presentation styles to include many of the different learning styles that may be in the audience.

- **Lecture:** A lecture is a quick, easy way to get new information to people, but it is trainer centered with little participation by others. A lecture also requires much preparation time.

- **Discussion:** A discussion allows an audience to actively participate. However, the trainer may need to do a lot of follow-up work, especially if some new concepts are confused when they are discussed by a large number of people.

- **Role play:** A role play allows participants to act as other people to try out something new, for example, a new teaching strategy, a new grammar or vocabulary item in a dialogue, or a new questioning technique.

- **Demonstration:** A demonstration might be very helpful to teachers trying to visualize a new method or teaching practice.

- **Case study:** A case study is a way of providing participants with a realistic situation; however, a trainer needs to be able to handle conflicting opinions about the case study, should they arise.

- **Games and learning activities:** Games and learning activities allow active participation, but not everyone likes games. Some feel that games are not serious enough for training; others feel that they add needed variety to sessions.

These are some of the ways to present information. A trainer needs to think carefully about the material to be presented and the characteristics of the audience involved. The choice of a certain type of presentation depends on a careful analysis of the material, the audience (its size and its familiarity with the topic of the presentation), and the length of the training. Using a variety of presentation types may ensure that the audience does not grow bored with the same type of presentation throughout the training.

Related to presentation type is the decision on when to have participants work as a whole or in small groups. There are no strict rules about when to use whole-group interaction and when to use small-group interaction. Whole-group interaction is generally used when a trainer wants to get the audience's opinions about a topic, to gauge the audience's prior knowledge about a topic, or when time is short. Small-group interaction is often used when a trainer wants the audience to discuss and examine a new idea through participatory interaction. Whether whole-group or small-group interaction is used, the trainer should clearly spell out what participants are to discuss or do. Because participants need something to refer back to when they begin their discussions, instructions are best given both orally and in writing. The instructions can be written on a whiteboard, a handout, a PowerPoint slide, a flip chart, or an overhead transparency.

Tips for small-group work in trainings:

When using small-group work, there are several tips that a trainer can follow to make the group work go smoothly and be meaningful to participants:

1. In addition to stating instructions clearly orally and in writing, state the amount of time that participants have to work. If a trainer is unsure how long an activity will take, it is better to give less time and lengthen it than to give too much time and lose participants' interest.

2. State clearly what each group will need to produce or present at the end of its time working together.

3. Move among groups and listen to what they are doing. This is especially important in the first few minutes of their time to ensure that all groups know what to do. However, do not interrupt group work when circulating. In most cases, the purpose of group work is to develop ideas through discussion. The role of the trainer is to answer clarification questions and monitor the time for the discussion. A trainer should not become a participant in small-group work.

4. Think carefully about the make-up of each group. Is it important that similar people are together, or would it be better to have different people together? (For example, will the activity be more meaningful if teachers and administrators are in the same groups, or if a group is all administrators or all teachers?) Also, should participants work in the same groups for the entire training, or would it be good to vary the groups?

5. Ensure that all groups have a chance to report after they have finished their work. If time is running short, have each group present only a portion of their work so that all groups can make a presentation, or have groups present their work to each other rather than to the whole group. An effective trainer monitors both the time spent in groups and the time each group spends reporting.

In *The CAELA Guide*, the workshop modules and the study circle guides include the type of presentation styles to be used. For example, in the workshop module on Using the TESOL Program Standards for Program Review and Improvement, the session begins with small-group work to have participants think about program, content, and performance standards. This small-group work introduces participants to the major terminology of the workshop, has them obtain information from a CAELA article written on the topic, and helps them get better acquainted with one another at the beginning of the training. This is followed by a lecture to give participants new information and explain it. After the lecture, there is a demonstration to show participants how to use the standards for self-review. Thus, the workshop uses different presentation styles. Each style is carefully chosen to complement the content of and purpose for the presentation.

Sequence the session:

After a presentation style is selected, it is important to sequence the session. How long a trainer spends on each part of the training will depend on how new or different the content of the training seems to the audience. By thinking through the sequencing of the session carefully and keeping an audience's training needs in mind, the trainer can see which parts of the training should receive more emphasis. The parts of a training session, in order, are

1. **Opening:** When beginning training, participants should know something about the other people in the training and should know the agenda for the training. Introductions are made, and the objectives of the training are presented. The objectives are best expressed positively: Provide a rationale for the work and motivate participants. (This is referred to as "Introduction and Warm-Up" in *The CAELA Guide.*)

2. **Presentation:** New information is introduced in the presentation style the trainer has decided upon. There is time for the audience to ask questions. A trainer may want to relate the new knowledge to participants' prior knowledge.

3. **Practice:** Participants are given an opportunity to practice the new concepts. The trainer can introduce controlled, guided, and free responses and can monitor participant work and give feedback.

4. **Application:** Participants apply the new information in a different situation or setting; they may apply it to their own teaching situation. The trainer monitors their work and provides opportunities for feedback. This step can be done during or after the training. For example, participants can return to their own classrooms and try out their new knowledge. Their peers or an administrator can give them feedback, or they can share their experiences at a subsequent training session.

5. **Closing:** The trainer reviews what has been done in the training and allows time for further questions participants might have. Participants, working alone or with the trainer, decide how they will implement what they have learned in their own classrooms or settings. (This is referred to as "Wrap-Up and Evaluation" in *The CAELA Guide.*)
   (Adapted from Mary Ann Christison and Sharron Bassano, "Advanced Teacher Training for Staff Developers and Teacher Facilitators," presented at TESOL 2003)

Prepare visuals:

It is a good idea to have visuals to support what a trainer says. Visuals include pictures, graphs, videos, film clips, charts, forms, overhead transparencies, and PowerPoint slides. These help participants understand what is being presented and, in rooms where acoustics are a problem, give support for what participants might not be able to hear clearly. Some visuals are used only in the training room, and some are given to participants to take with them. Trainers may want to reproduce PowerPoint slides or overheads on handouts so that participants can take the information with them. The results of group work, role plays, or any realia used in a trainer's presentation will most likely remain with the trainer at the end of the session. But it is helpful if the trainer can provide handouts of the resources participants need to implement ideas and activities from the training in their classes and report back to the group, either in another training session or by another means (e.g., in online discussions).

When preparing visuals for the whole group to see, keep the following in mind:

- The font should be simple, clear, and big enough to be seen from the back of the room.
- Each visual should have enough, but not too much, information on it. Crowded visuals are often difficult for an audience to read. Participants will spend more time trying to figure out what the visual says than listening to the message a trainer is giving.
- If a visual has a chart or graph on it, all parts of the chart or graph need to be clearly labeled.

Check supplies:

Make a list of all the supplies that are needed for training. Depending on the training, supplies may include pens, pencils, paper, readings, notebooks, poster paper, transparencies, whiteboard markers, Post-its, an overhead projector, a TV, a VCR, and a laptop and projector. (See the Training Checklist at the end of this section.) If the trainer is responsible for bringing the supplies, then a running list of supplies should be kept while preparing for the training. If someone else is responsible for supplies, then the trainer may want to contact this person ahead of the training to ensure that the supplies will arrive on time.

Check the training venue:

Find out what the training venue is like and ask whether the training room can be set up in a way that complements the presentation style. If a training venue cannot accommodate the trainer's preferred presentation style, consider changing the venue or the presentation style. If the trainer is not near the training venue, it is a good idea to have an onsite coordinator who can take care of the logistics before the date(s) of the training and ensure that the room and equipment are set up correctly on the day of the training. It is also a good idea to try the equipment the day before the training to make sure it is functioning properly and to identify a technical person onsite who will be available in the event of technical difficulties.

During the Training

A trainer needs to be aware of the following aspects of the training while it is occurring to ensure that the training is going well and to make adjustments if needed.

Time:

A trainer should be aware of the passage of time throughout the training and try to stay with the original schedule as much as possible. Participants in a training often have different interests and knowledge needs; for example, even though one group may want to spend more time on a topic than has been scheduled, to do so may result in others not getting the information they wanted from a later section of the schedule. The trainer, aware of the group's interest, can make these decisions for the group or negotiate them with the group. If some participants want more time to discuss a topic, or when some digress into an interesting, related topic, the trainer can interrupt these comments and ask that these topics be discussed during a break or at lunch.

Nonparticipation:

If some individuals are not participating in the training, a trainer should consider whether or not it is important to try to bring them into the discussion. As these trainings are for adults, there may be some topics that are more important to some participants than others, and some people may lose interest when topics not of interest to them are being discussed. In most cases, a trainer can simply leave these people alone. Participants may be learning or interested even though they do not appear to be paying attention. A trainer might also try to bring them into the discussion by asking them nonthreatening questions. (For example, do not ask, "What do you think of this?" because they may not know what "this" is. Instead, ask, "What do you think of using mixed-ability grouping for a vocabulary exercise?") However, if a group of participants is not paying attention and creating a disturbance, then a trainer might want to talk to the members individually during a break, asking why the training is not meeting their needs.

Availability:

All trainers need to be available during breaks to talk with participants. Some of the most important questions come from individual conversations during breaks, and questions asked during breaks help the trainer to gauge when a participant has not understood a concept or idea. If one or several participants do not understand an activity or concept, it may be worth repeating that information for the entire group. Trainers also should have time for a break. Whether it be a few minutes away during group work or during lunch, trainers need to think about when they can sit for a moment and regroup during the training day. If two trainers are cotraining, it is much easier to take a break than if a trainer is working alone.

Using visuals:

The role of visuals is to support the work that the trainer and participants are doing. When using a visual aid, be sure that all participants can see it: Do not stand in front of it. Also, put a visual up when it is related to the topic of discussion and take it down when that topic is finished. It can be confusing when a visual is left up after the discussion of a topic has finished.

A list of questions and comments:

During the training, keep a running list of participants' questions and comments on a flip chart or whiteboard that everyone can see. Sometimes this is referred to as a "parking lot." This list is especially important if there is not enough time to answer everything during the training. If a trainer has a list of questions or comments, they can be answered when there might be a few minutes to spare in the schedule. If there are questions on the list that go unanswered during the training, the trainer can refer to these questions at the end of the training, point out other resources participants can use, and respond to participants via email. If there is no list, these questions may be lost, and participants might leave the training feeling that all their questions were not answered.

After the Training

After the training, the trainer should be available for 20–30 minutes, if possible, to answer remaining questions. As participants start to leave, they often start to think about implementing a new method or idea in their own classrooms, and questions are likely to arise. A trainer should give participants his or her contact information so that they can contact the trainer with questions as they are implementing a new concept in their classrooms or institutions.

After the training, a trainer should look over the training evaluations. These can give the trainer an idea of what participants liked and understood easily, what participants did not enjoy so much, and what was more difficult for them. A trainer can use this information to redesign subsequent trainings on this topic.

Finally, if there are remaining questions from the training that there was not time to answer, or if the trainer has promised to send participants more information or material, these should be followed up at the first opportunity, preferably the trainer's first workday after the training. By sending participants information and answers to their questions, the trainer builds credibility and establishes a link with participants beyond the training session. This is especially helpful if the participants will be implementing something new in their classes or programs.

The guidelines discussed above are presented in checklists on the following pages. It is hoped that when these guidelines are followed, participants will find trainings professionally rewarding and personally enjoyable experiences.

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Adult ESL Instructor Needs Assessment

Name ______________________________

Program/Agency ______________________________

Street ______________________________

City/County ______________ State ______________ Zip ______________

Phone ______________ Email ______________

Teaching Assignment

Briefly describe your current teaching assignment, including type (e.g., workplace, EL/civics, family literacy), instructional hours per class, whether there is managed or open enrollment, access to computer technology for instructors and learners, and whether you have paid planning time.

____

____

____

____

What adult ESL level(s) do you teach? (circle)

literacy   beginning   intermediate low   intermediate high

advanced low   advanced high

What is your teaching situation? (check one box in #1, #2, #3)

1. ❑ rural ❑ suburban ❑ urban ❑ mixed
2. ❑ isolated ❑ collegial
3. ❑ part-time ❑ full-time

Education

Degrees ______________ Fields of study ______________

Certificates or endorsements ______________________________

Years Adult ESL Teaching Experience

❑ Less than 1 year ❑ 1–3 years ❑ 3–9 years ❑ 10+ years

Training and Professional Development

Types of activities:

Workshops/presentations	❑ participant	❑ trainer
Observation/feedback	❑ participant	❑ trainer
Projects (e.g., curriculum development)	❑ participant	❑ trainer
Inquiry/research	❑ participant	❑ trainer
Other	❑ participant	❑ trainer

Specific topics: ____

____

Learning Format (check any that apply)

❑ Large group ❑ Online ❑ Lecture/reading

❑ Small group ❑ Online/face-to-face hybrid ❑ Interactive

❑ Mentoring ❑ Peer coaching ❑ Study circle

❑ Other ______________________________

Professional Development Preferences

If you could select your own mode of professional development, what would be your preference? Please rank-order, with 1 being your top choice and 5 being your last choice.

❑ Developing your own plan of study with support from the state or program

❑ Researching an issue, problem, or topic in your own teaching environment
(Please check: ❑ alone ❑ with others ❑ online)

❑ Practicing classroom strategies with feedback from colleague or supervisor who observes

❑ Working on a program project (e.g., curriculum development or standards)

❑ Attending workshops to learn new instructional skills

Professional Development Content

What topics would you like to learn more about? Designate your top three choices (1 = highest priority)

_______ assessment issues (for placement, National Reporting System [NRS], in-class)

_______ cultural issues

_______ communicative strategies

_______ curriculum (development and use)

_______ EL/civics and citizenship (content and issues)

_______ lesson planning

_______ needs assessment and goal-setting strategies

_______ managing multilevel classes

_______ professional concerns (certification, benefits, advancement, outlook)

_______ program issues (retention, funding, recruitment, type and intensity of classes)

_______ standards (state, program, content, alignment to curriculum)

_______ teaching ESL learners in ABE classes

_______ teaching literacy and beginning levels

_______ teaching reading to adult English language learners

_______ teaching writing to adult English language learners

_______ techniques (role plays, Language Experience Approach [LEA], Total Physical Response [TPR], dialogues, etc.)

_______ technology
(❑ instructional use ❑ teacher use ❑ data entry)

_______ other

_______ other

Comments: ____

____

Thank you for taking the time to fill out this survey. We expect to have results of the survey available by __________________________.

Training Observation Form

The following observation form can be used in training novice trainers. The form asks novice trainers to watch an expert trainer and make notes about what the expert does in a training and how he or she does it. It is especially important that the novice watch carefully and give specific examples of how a trainer carries out each part of the training. By following this form and making detailed notes, a novice trainer will begin to understand both the delivery of content in a training and different methods of content delivery. The novice will also see how an expert trainer gives participants an opportunity to practice what they are learning. Finally, through this process, a novice may begin to notice how an expert trainer interacts with and responds to participants.

Training Observation Form

Trainer: ______________________ Title/topic of training: ______________________

Observer: ______________________ Date: ______________________

Components of the Training Session

For each item—if observed—indicate what you observed by checking the appropriate box(es) and/or providing a description/example.

Introduction

Did the trainer…	*Description/example(s)*
1. provide an opportunity for participants to introduce themselves?	❑ through an activity that allowed the trainer to learn more about the participants' backgrounds ❑ through an activity that encouraged the group to discover things about each other ❑ other ______________________
2. state objectives of the training and review the agenda?	How? ______________________ ______________________
3. provide an opportunity for participants to become familiar with the training materials?	❑ by walking the participants through the materials ❑ by using the table of contents
4. check the background information participants may have regarding the topic of the training (if this was not done when participants introduced themselves)?	❑ by asking participants questions about the topic ❑ by playing a word association game with the topic ❑ other ______________________

Presentation

Did the trainer...	*Description/example(s)*
1. choose the appropriate presentation style(s) for the content and audience?	❑ lecture ❑ discussion ❑ role play ❑ demonstration ❑ game or other learning activity ❑ case study ❑ other ______________________
2. give adequate and appropriate explanations of new concepts?	How? ______________________ ______________________
3. respond to participants' questions?	❑ by answering questions immediately ❑ by deferring questions until later during the training ❑ by noting the questions on newsprint to get back to later
4. check participants' comprehension periodically?	❑ by asking general questions (Is there anything you do not understand?) ❑ by asking content-specific questions ❑ other ______________________
5. use visuals that are clear and easy to understand?	Note anything unclear ______________________ ______________________
6. review and summarize the main points at the end of the presentation?	❑ by stating main points ❑ by showing a visual of the main points ❑ by asking participants what the main points were ❑ other ______________________

Practice

Did the trainer…	*Description/example(s)*
1. set up the activities clearly?	❑ by giving instructions in both speech and writing ❑ by giving an example or short demonstration ❑ other ______________________
2. use the activities to give participants a chance to practice what was learned during the presentation?	How? ______________________ ______________________
3. visit all groups (if the activity required small-group work)?	❑ by listening to groups work together ❑ by answering clarifying questions
4. use appropriate methods and materials for the for the reporting of small-group work?	❑ each group reported orally ❑ each group reported orally with a writing visual (flipchart paper, transparency, etc.) ❑ each group prepared a poster and groups circulated to view each other's work ❑ other ______________________

Application

Did the trainer…	*Description/example(s)*
1. give participants an opportunity to apply what they learned?	❑ in a new situation at the training ❑ in their own situation after the training ❑ other ______________________
2. give participants time to share their applications?	❑ in small groups ❑ in the whole group ❑ other ______________________
3. evaluate participants' application of the concepts?	How? ______________________ ______________________
4. give participants an opportunity to comment on/evaluate each other's applications?	How? ______________________ ______________________

Evaluation

Did the trainer...	*Description/example(s)*
1. give participants an opportunity to evaluate the workshop content?	❑ written reflection ❑ evaluation forms ❑ other ______________________
2. give participants an opportunity to evaluate the presenter's skills?	❑ written reflection ❑ evaluation forms ❑ other ______________________

Follow-Up

Did the trainer...	*Description/example(s)*
1. give participants a way to contact him or her after the training?	❑ via email ❑ via telephone ❑ other ______________________
2. keep a "parking lot" (list) of participants' questions and handle all questions in one way or another (either during the training or after it)?	❑ answered all during the training ❑ will follow up via email/telephone ❑ other ______________________
3. give participants a task to do and offer to follow it up with them?	❑ via email ❑ via telephone ❑ in a subsequent training ❑ other ______________________

Other observations or questions that you have:

Below are a variety of facilitation and time management strategies to enhance the acquisition of new skills by participants. For those that you observed, describe or give examples of what the trainer did. Add others that you observed.

Facilitation Skills	***Description/Example(s)***
Use a method to address off-topic items in order to stay on the topic.	
Provide clear explanations and demonstrate sufficient background knowledge of the topic.	
Use clear transitions from one section of the training to another.	
Use a variety of grouping strategies to encourage participation (e.g., cooperative groups, pair activities).	
Clarify and paraphrase main points.	
Summarize participants' comments for the whole group as needed.	

Time Management	***Description/Example(s)***
Allot appropriate amount of time to each section of the training by using time limits for different activities.	
Pace training according to the participants' needs.	
Make time adjustments on the agenda as needed.	
Complete each section of the training.	
Start and end on time.	
Give participants time to answer questions posed to them.	
Give participants time to process the new information.	

Other observations or questions that you have:

Training Checklist

Before the Training

Have I…

_____ reviewed the material in light of the content and audience?

_____ decided on a presentation style?

- ❑ lecture
- ❑ discussion
- ❑ role play
- ❑ demonstration
- ❑ games and learning activities
- ❑ case study
- ❑ other ________________________________

_____ decided on the use of group work?

- ❑ small-group work for ________________________________
  - ❑ groups will consist of ________________________________
- ❑ whole-group work for ________________________________

_____ sequenced the session?

- ❑ the opening: ________________________________
- ❑ the presentation: ________________________________
- ❑ the practice: ________________________________
- ❑ the application: ________________________________
- ❑ the closing: ________________________________

_____ prepared my visuals?

_____ stocked my supplies? I need:

- ❑ pens/pencils
- ❑ readings
- ❑ poster paper
- ❑ whiteboard and markers
- ❑ overhead projector
- ❑ laptop/projector
- ❑ paper
- ❑ notebooks
- ❑ transparencies or PowerPoint slides
- ❑ Post-its
- ❑ TV/VCR
- ❑ other items: ________________

_____ checked the training venue?

During the Training

Am I…

- _____ assigning amounts of time to each presentation and activity?
- _____ keeping track of time?
- _____ managing the time on each topic as appropriate to the audience's needs and interests?
- _____ aware of which participants are interested in the entire training and which participants are interested in certain topics?
- _____ making myself available to participants during breaks and meals?
- _____ using my visuals well, not standing in front of them or keeping them up longer than necessary?
- _____ keeping a running list ("parking lot") of questions and comments and referring back to this when there is a little extra time?
- _____ giving my contact information to participants?

After the Training

Have I…

- _____ responded to participants' questions at the close of the training?
- _____ read the evaluations and made notes as to what will stay the same and what will change the next time this training is given?
- _____ emailed answers to participants whose questions I did not have the time or the resources to answer during the training?
- _____ sent materials to participants who requested them?

Professional Development Models

Over the last 20 years, the rationale for teachers' professional development has shifted slightly. Twenty years ago, professional development was conducted to help teachers institute new methods and practices in their classrooms. More recently, this purpose has become incorporated into a wider view of professional development, which now has as its goal reflection and inquiry about the implementation of evidenced-based practices. Only after engaging in reflection and inquiry are new methods and practices introduced, implemented, and evaluated.

The Nature of Professional Development

Professional development is no longer seen as a one-shot training, but as systematic steps of adaptation and change that occur on both the program and classroom levels. Professional development for program staff keeps them adapting to changing program needs and expectations over time. With this long-range view, new indicators for quality professional development have been developed (Clair, 2000; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Sherman, Dlott, Bamford, McGivern, & Cohn, 2003; Sherman & Kutner, n.d.). These indicators show that quality professional development

- Has multiple beneficiaries, including instructors, administrators, programs, states, and ultimately, learners
- Should be driven by an analysis of teachers' needs and goals as related to learners' goals, needs, and performance
- Is part of a comprehensive plan developed collaboratively by those who will participate in and facilitate that development
- Focuses on individual, collegial, and organizational improvement
- Should include opportunities for both theoretical understanding and practical application reflecting the best available research about teaching and learning
- Should encourage teachers to reflect on social, cultural, and linguistic issues
- Enables teachers to develop further expertise in subject content, teaching strategies, use of technologies, and other essential elements in teaching to high standards
- Incorporates evaluation as an integral component
- Requires substantial time and other resources and is continuous

By keeping these quality indicators in mind when planning a training or writing a professional development plan, the holistic, systemic nature of professional development is sustained.

Recent research has shown that one model of professional development is not necessarily better than the others, though one model may provide the best fit with a particular content, time frame, and audience. Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, and Rowe (2003) studied adult ESL teacher change as a result of three different models of professional development: multisession workshops, mentor teacher groups, and practitioner research groups. They found that teacher change in these three models was minimal, though a larger proportion of mentor teacher and practitioner research group participants, as compared with workshop participants, changed how they feel they learn best. Based on their study, the authors recommend that a trainer keep the following in mind when designing training:

- Ensure that professional development is of high quality, especially in terms of design, facilitation, and group dynamics.
- Offer a variety of professional development models for teachers to attend.
- In recruiting for "reform" models of professional development (e.g., mentor teacher groups, practitioner research groups, study circles, professional learning communities), be clear about what teacher participation will be like.
- Help teachers acquire skills to build theories of good teaching and student success.
- Add activities to professional development to help teachers strategize how to deal with factors that affect their ability to take action.

With these ideas in mind, trainers can think strategically about the content to be delivered at the training, the audience for the training, and which model(s) of professional development to use.

Four Professional Development Models

The following describes four different models of professional development: workshop/presentation, observation with feedback, inquiry research, and product/program development. (See Table 1, Comparative Overview of Professional Development Approaches, at the end of this section.) The first type, workshop/presentation, is a "traditional" professional development activity; the others are "reform" types of professional development (Smith et al., 2003). Richardson (1998) defines reform types of professional development as being based on new philosophies about the purpose of professional development: helping teachers acquire a change orientation, rather than just adopt new techniques. With reform types of professional development, Smith et al. emphasize the importance of telling teachers beforehand what their participation will be like. Some of these models are more long term and more intensive than a workshop or presentation, and if teachers do not know this when they enroll, they will be more likely to drop out.

On the following pages, each of these models' characteristics, strengths, and issues are described. In practice, there is overlap among these models. For example, a workshop may include follow-up in the form of observation with feedback, or a new curriculum (a product) may be the result of the work of a study circle. Even though these types of professional development may be combined, they have been separated here to give a clear picture of each one. This information should help a trainer decide what model(s) of professional development to use in training.

Workshop/Presentation

A workshop or presentation relies on communicating an approach or method and the theory behind it to participants, as well as giving them the opportunity to practice and apply the idea. It can introduce new strategies through a formal presentation, through discovery, or through problem solving. It usually occurs over 1 or 2 days and is therefore referred to as "one-shot" training. Practicing and applying a new idea can be accomplished through demonstration and modeling during the training itself. After the trainer gives a model, participants practice what the trainer has done, coaching and giving feedback to each other. Through these steps, participants benefit by learning proven behaviors and techniques and by practicing them during the training with the expertise of the trainer and their fellow participants. In this way, they are guided to change their behavior in a low-stakes environment through scaffolding and the support of others present.

Practicing and applying a new idea can also be done through problem solving and dialogue. For example, participants may work in small groups to solve a problem that has been posed. Instead of the trainer presenting new information, groups can be given this information through a jigsaw reading, applying what is in the reading to a particular problem.

A workshop or presentation is the first step in change; it usually only makes participants aware of a new or different idea. After the workshop, participants need to return to their programs and apply and practice the new idea in their own environment. Change takes time. To ensure that change is happening, workshops and presentations should be followed with observations, feedback, and further discussion.

The implementation of a workshop or presentation is usually the responsibility of a trainer and involves several steps: conducting a needs assessment, planning the workshop, conducting the workshop, and evaluating the workshop. Evaluation should be done both during the workshop itself and as part of long term follow-up for the participants involved (through observations, online discussion, or a subsequent training). More information on each of these steps can be found in the Training Tips section in this guide. By carefully going through the process described in Training Tips, a workshop or presentation can be meaningful to the participants and provide an opportunity to increase participants' knowledge and skills.

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The workshop or presentation model of professional development has both strengths and weaknesses. It appears to be the most effective approach for learning discrete skills, such as how to comment on students' writing, but it is not very effective in helping teachers examine multiple ways to solve a problem, such as how to motivate their particular group of students to read more. There also may be logistical and funding problems with a trainer's ability to provide adequate follow-up with participants after the training. Without this follow-up, changes and gains will be minimal.

The workshop/presentation model remains the most popular model for professional development. However, with the recent emphasis on lifelong learning that results in gains in student learning, workshops and presentations can no longer be delivered as one-shot events. They should be integrated into more comprehensive professional development plans that are sustained and systematic.

Observation With Feedback

The observation with feedback model is grounded in the literature on teacher supervision and evaluation, peer coaching, and cognitive processes. In these training situations, a novice participant works with an expert who guides the novice and gives comments and suggestions directly after observing the novice teacher teach a class. An observation may focus on the development of one teaching skill (e.g., the way the teacher responds to questions from students), or it may look at the novice's skills holistically (e.g., presentation of material, interaction skills, and general teaching style). One of the strengths of the observation with feedback model is that the advice of the expert is tailored to the level and needs of the participant being observed. Also, because observation and feedback are done over time, the expert can make sure that the participant has understood and applied new concepts appropriately. There is ample opportunity for quality control and for the participant to ask questions and receive advice pertinent to his or her particular teaching situation.

The implementation of observation with feedback is the responsibility of an expert (trainer). It involves identifying the purpose of the observation with feedback, designing the approach, selecting the participants (both expert and novice), preparing and supporting the participants, developing and implementing plans, evaluating the process, and planning next steps. (See How to Conduct Peer Coaching and Mentoring in this guide for more information about each of these steps.)

Another strength of the observation with feedback model is that it helps participants become more reflective about their own teaching. By listening to someone else's comments on their teaching, they can begin to see themselves as practitioners and concentrate not just on the message they are delivering, but also on how they are delivering it. Observation with feedback also increases collaboration between an expert and a participant and among participants, and increases their ability to see more than one way to teach a concept, broadening the horizons of all who participate. If participants observe one another's classes, they are exposed to many different teaching styles. This is especially helpful for novice teachers if they are still in the process of developing their own teaching style.

The main challenge with the observation with feedback model is that it is time-consuming for the participants. They must find time in their schedules for the observations and pre- and post-observation conferences. Also, an expert must be very flexible and know that there are many ways of delivering a lesson. The expert should be sensitive in guiding the participant in how to incorporate a new concept into his or her own teaching style in the classroom. If an expert is too rigid, the participant will not permanently incorporate anything new and will begin to question the teaching style he or she has developed.

Inquiry Research

The inquiry research model of professional development is grounded in reflective practice. Through their own teaching practice, participants work collaboratively to formulate research questions that they would like to investigate. They then look at educational theory and think critically about the theory and the teaching and learning that is happening in their own classrooms. Through this collaborative critical inquiry, they formulate research questions and design research methodology and data collection from which they hope to gain answers to their questions. This process requires the involvement of someone who is knowledgeable about research. This could be one of the teachers or an administrator. It may be less taxing, however, if there are several people, both teachers and administrators, who have a good understanding of research. They can work together with participants to design their research methodology and data collection instruments, and all will learn through their collaboration.

After the data collection procedures or instruments are designed, participants can carry out the research in their own classrooms, programs, or throughout their state, either alone or with colleagues. By engaging in this research process with students and a curriculum they know well, participants are able to reflect on their own teaching situations and see how a theory of language acquisition may or may not be the best explanation for what is happening in their classrooms. If the answers they get are definitive, then they have a greater understanding of what to do next in their classrooms; however, if their answers are not definitive, they will have a better understanding of the situation and can ask more specific questions if they choose to do another round of research.

The research methods that are most often used in the inquiry research model of professional development are qualitative and include interviews, surveys, observations (occasionally video recorded), focus group discussions, pretests, posttests with different methods, and discourse analyses. This research is often self-directed, with the teacher using this as an opportunity to learn more about him- or herself as a teacher and the ways students respond to what the teacher does in the classroom. The cycle of inquiry is based on eight steps:

1. Identify problem, issue, and question.
2. Explore data collection methods.
3. Implement data collection.
4. Analyze data.
5. Plan action.
6. Implement action.
7. Monitor and evaluate.
8. Share results.

Through this process, participants can gain valuable knowledge about themselves as teachers, their students, and their classes. They can also see for themselves how theory can inform practice and how practice can inform theory. They come to understand the research process firsthand and, through it, may contribute to the knowledge base at their institutions. By doing classroom-based research and considering its results carefully, they and their institutions become more informed decision makers, using the results of research as the basis for classroom and institutional decisions.

The challenges to the inquiry research model of professional development are that it requires time and a staff ready to undertake research. Both of these areas may be challenging for programs with many part-time staff members. Also, as mentioned above, someone on staff needs to be knowledgeable about research design and methodology. Such a person may not be found in some programs.

Variations on the inquiry research model of professional development are study circles and professional learning communities. In both of these, staff members work together to decide on a question and then embark on a program of study and discussion to try to answer their question. Their program of study is usually built around reading books and articles together, trying new ideas in their classrooms, and discussing how they went. Their program of study may also include classroom research.

Study circles and professional learning communities differ from one another mainly in how formal they are and the amount of time they involve. A study circle is a group that meets at least two times to reflect on the meaning of theory and research and to explore its applications to their own work. The group chooses a topic that it would like to study in hopes of resolving a problem in the classrooms or program, or a topic about which group members would like to learn more. (For more information about study circles, see the section on How to Conduct a Study Circle in this guide.)

A professional learning community is a group of educators—teachers and administrators—who "continuously seek and share learning, and act on their learning. The goal of their actions is to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for the students' benefit . . ." (Hord, 1997). Professional learning communities adopt many different formats, but all have as their goal enhanced student learning. Schmoker (2004, p. 430) states that "there is broad, even remarkable, concurrence among members of the research community on the effects of carefully structured learning teams on the improvement of instruction." Professional learning communities, however, are more than having teachers and an administrator sit together and study. After study, teachers and administrators help each other implement what they have learned through observation, conferencing, and other methods of giving and receiving feedback.

There are many benefits of participating in a professional learning community. Hord (1997) reports that results for teachers include a reduced sense of isolation, an increased commitment to the mission and goals of the program, a sense of shared responsibility for the development of students, learning that exemplifies good teaching and classroom practice, and the sense that "teachers will be well informed, professionally renewed, and inspired to inspire their students." Hord also reports that students benefit when their teachers and program administrators are part of professional learning communities. This is demonstrated by decreased dropout rates, fewer absences, increased learning, larger academic gains, and smaller achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds. Professional learning communities are an excellent way to ensure that the professional development activities of teachers and administrators result in enhanced student learning.

The challenges to participating in a professional learning community are that it requires a very supportive administration, and it is time-consuming. Administrators need to be seen as members of the group, not as directors of the group (Hord, 1997). In addition, all members of the professional learning community need to commit to spending the needed time and determine a regular time and place to meet. Members of the community also make a commitment to doing classroom observations and giving peer feedback.

Product/Program Development

The product/program development model is grounded in the literature on educational change and is most frequently used in K–12 settings (Boyle, Lamprianou, & Boyle, n.d.; Richardson, 1998). It is professional development that takes a teacher, a group of teachers, or an entire institution through a change process. The change process is usually implemented in response to an assessment of teachers' needs, students' needs, or both. The needs assessment may highlight a problem that needs to be solved or an area in which teachers feel they need more information. Teachers and administrators should select together the change they want to implement based on the results of this needs assessment. However, sometimes this process is initiated as the result of a directive. This may or may not be as successful in motivating change, depending on the teaching/learning situation and the personalities involved. Products that may be developed through this process include a new curriculum, a new textbook, new or streamlined processes within an institution, improved student learning, and improved student retention. Through participating in this model of professional development, teachers and administrators can have their ideas validated as they acquire important attitudes and skills.

The product/program development model takes participants through a four-step process:

1. Identify a need or problem.
2. Develop an action plan.
3. Implement the plan.
4. Assess/evaluate the results of the plan.

The process works best if teachers and administrators collaborate throughout, with administrators being group members rather than group leaders, similar to their role in a professional learning community. For the process to be carried out smoothly, participants also need to identify situational conditions (administrative commitment, funding for product development and publication, time, resources, and flexibility) that will help them meet their goals. Participants need to think carefully about the time that is needed for this process; however, if a product is to be produced from it, this is often an incentive for participants. If participants need professional development work for their performance evaluations, working on product/program development is a good way for them to increase their knowledge as well as document their learning.

Adapting the Models

Workshop/presentation, observation with feedback, inquiry research, and product/program development are the main models of professional development used to train teachers today. A trainer should think carefully about the steps that each model requires, his or her own strengths and weaknesses, and the needs of participants, and choose the one that is most appropriate. The challenges of implementing these models, such as the time commitment involved for inquiry research or the level of expertise required for observation with feedback, may cause some programs to be reluctant to conduct professional development activities or to go beyond the traditional one-shot workshop model. These professional development models may be adapted, however, depending on a program's needs, available resources, and teacher qualifications and experiences. The following ideas present ways to adapt these models:

- **Adaptations of the workshop/presentation model:** Workshops can be a cost-effective way to train a large group of teachers on a specific topic or skill in a relatively short amount of time. However, finding a qualified trainer to lead the workshop can be difficult for some programs. In a large workshop setting, teachers may not feel connected to the trainer or the topic; once the workshop is over, the trainer is often limited in the ability to follow-up with the attendees. Programs may adapt the workshop model to be more teacher centered and systematic by conducting mini peer-coaching sessions, which have been referred to as "coaching corners" in some schools. Coaching corners are small group activities that focus on a particular strategy that a teacher would like to share. Teachers sign up both to lead and participate in the groups. After the teacher-coach presents the strategy, each participant discusses how it can work in his or her class. Teachers can rotate through several "corners" in one session. After an established amount of time, they can reconvene to evaluate how the strategy worked in different classes. The teacher-coach benefits from the experience of presenting materials and receives feedback on the strategy presented, and the teachers are exposed to different ideas and topics that they have chosen to learn about from a colleague whom they can communicate with on a regular basis.

- **Adaptations of the observation with feedback model:** When the time and resources are available for pairs of teachers (novice and expert) to engage in observation with feedback activities, the benefits are many. If a program does not have the resources or the expert mentors to facilitate and lead the observations and feedback in an effective way, this model of professional development can still be modified and used by individual teachers. Teachers can identify an area of their instruction that they would like to examine or improve (e.g., based on their student performance data, curriculum and materials, or a research topic of interest such as error correction). They can then videotape themselves teaching and use a checklist or observation sheet they develop to guide their own self-reflection. (See Allwright & Bailey, 1991; Nunan, 1992; and Wajnryb, 1992 for ideas.) The benefits of teacher self-observation and reflection using video have been documented (Tomkins, 2006).

- **Adaptations of the inquiry research model:** Teachers who are not able to participate in the intensive inquiry research process or the study circle/professional learning community variations at the local program level can be encouraged to participate in other accessible communities, such as electronic discussion lists, online courses, or Internet bulletin boards. For example, the National Institute for Literacy's Adult English Language Learners electronic discussion list covers a range of topics for teachers to follow and contribute to, from research to promising instructional practices. (See www.nifl.gov to subscribe.) (See Mathews-Aydinli & Taylor, 2005 for an extensive list of online courses and learning communities.)

- **Adaptations of the product/program development model:** The development of a product/program, such as a new curriculum or assessment, can be challenging to undertake and see through to completion. However, this valuable process can be carried out on a smaller scale through a collection of teacher resources, such as lesson plans and informal assessment ideas and related reflections. This type of product can emerge as a follow-up to a coaching corners session or in response to an analysis of student performance data that indicate student weaknesses in a particular language skill or at a proficiency level.

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Table 1. Comparative Overview of Professional Development Approaches

Approach	Underlying Assumptions	Theory and Background	Implementation	Results	Issues
Workshop/ Presentation	*Practitioners* • Benefit by learning proven behaviors and techniques; and • Change their behavior and learn new behavior not in their present repertoire.	• Knowing theory is essential but not sufficient to bring about change. Also need – Demonstration/ modeling, – Practice, – Feedback, and – Coaching or other approach. • Change requires time. Only awareness can be gained in a single training session.	Usually the responsibility of a professional development coordinator and involves the following steps: 1. Conduct a needs assessment; 2. Plan the workshop/ presentation session(s); 3. Conduct workshops incorporating elements of effective professional development (see previous column); 4. Evaluate results (both short and long term).	• Well-documented in K–12 arena. • When all elements in place, see significant gains in knowledge, skills, and transfer of learning.	• While often the easiest and most inexpensive approach, especially for large numbers of staff, adequate time frequently not provided for conducting needs assessment, planning, and implementing workshops/presentations. • Appears most effective for learning discrete skills. • When coaching is involved, there are logistical and funding problems for adult education; but without this element, gains are minimal.
Observation/ Feedback	*Practitioners* • Enhance ability to reflect upon own practices through observation of others; • Enhance growth through reflection and analysis of instructional practices; and • Continue to improve when they see positive results from their efforts to change.	• Grounded in literature on teacher evaluation, clinical supervision, cognitive processes, and peer coaching. • Alternating focused and unfocused observations. • Applicable to practitioners at different levels of cognition.	Two major processes: observation and feedback. Four steps: 1. Conduct a preobservation conference, 2. Observe instruction, 3. Analyze data, and 4. Conduct postobservation conference. Each step has guidelines for successful implementation.	• Observation/ feedback approach successful in a small number of studies. • Anecdotal information cites benefits, including – Improved self-analysis, – Professional skill, – Increased collaboration, – Improved teaching performance, and – Increased student growth.	• Observation/feedback is often time-consuming for participants. • Experts who are giving feedback need to understand that there are many ways to deliver a lesson.

Table 1. Comparative Overview of Professional Development Approaches (Continued)

Approach	Underlying Assumptions	Theory and Background	Implementation	Results	Issues
Inquiry/ Research	*Practitioners* • Can control own professional practices; • Have legitimate expertise and experience; • Will search for answers to important questions and reflect on that data; and • Can see theory as informing practice and vice versa.	• Grounded in reflective practice. • Describes relationship between inquiry and critical thought. • Relates theory to practice. • Builds knowledge for teaching from the inside-out.	Methods most often qualitative and self-directed. Cycle of inquiry based on eight steps: 1. Identify problem, issue, question. 2. Explore data collection methods. 3. Implement data collection. 4. Analyze data. 5. Plan action. 6. Implement action. 7. Monitor and evaluate. 8. Share results.	Benefits for practitioners, mostly anecdotal, include • Learn research process, • Become more critical users of information, • Contribute to the knowledge base, • Become more informed decision makers, • Improve instruction, and • Promote collegial interaction.	• Requires time and staff readiness. • May be difficult for part-time adult educators to fit in schedules. • Need research skills. • Requires support (financial and administrative). • Based on staff procedures.
Product/ Program Development	*Practitioners* • Learn best when they have a need to know or problem to solve; • Understand best what is needed to improve their practice; and • Acquire important attitudes and skills through participation in school-improvement or curriculum-development activities.	• Grounded in literature on change. • Most frequently used in K–12. • Helps improve group dynamics and ability to think. • Five-stage models include readiness, planning, training, implementation, and maintenance (others include evaluation).	Often developed as a result of directives, funding, research data, or problems. Steps include 1. Identify need or problem. 2. Develop an action plan. 3. Implement plan. 4. Assess/evaluate results. Professional development coordinator may serve as trainer. Above four steps should be ongoing.	• Some K–12 data show student gains (reading). • Little research on impact on adult programs. • Often a "product" results. (Some studies have assessed satisfaction with product.)	• Need to identify situational conditions (i.e., administrative commitment, funding, time, resources, and flexibility). • Adult education's part-time nature creates problems for widespread instructor participation. • Commitment from practitioners (often without collegiality or benefits) presents problem for adult education. • Criteria for success include – Dispersed power, – Stress on professional development, – Broad dissemination, – Involved leadership, – Well-defined goals and "vision," – Accomplishments, and rewarded at all levels.

From Sherman, R., & Kutner, M. (n.d.). *Professional Development Resource Guide for Adult Education.* Washington, DC: Building Professional Development Partnership Project (Pro-Net), Pelavin Research Institute. Adapted with permission.

How to Conduct a Study Circle

What Is a Study Circle?

A study circle is a process where a group of practitioners read and discuss educational theory and research and consider its implications for classroom and program practice. Led by a facilitator, the group members meet multiple times to reflect on the meaning of theory and research and to explore its applications to their own work. A study circle is not a training session on a given topic, but rather a way to study with colleagues and, in the process, to use research to improve one's practice. (Note: In other sections of *The CAELA Guide,* we use the term "trainer" to describe the leader of the sessions. In this section on study circles, we use the term "facilitator," because these are facilitated discussions rather than trainings.)

CAELA materials (briefs, digests, Q&As) synthesize research on a range of adult ESL topics. They are effective for introducing practitioners to current research and to strategies for applying that research. For several of these topics, CAELA has produced study circle guides. The guides are built on the principles and practices that are described below. These same principles can be used by facilitators to create new study circle guides based on CAELA materials or to create other research-based materials.

CAELA provides study circle guides on the following topics:

- Second language acquisition
- Teaching beginning levels
- Teaching listening, speaking, and pronunciation
- Workplace education

Organizing a Study Circle

For study circles based on CAELA materials, we recommend a group of 6–12 participants that meets at 2-week intervals for two or more 1.5- to 2-hour sessions. The CAELA study circle guides are written for such a design but can be adapted for varied contexts. They are intended for practitioners (both new and experienced) who are actively engaged in adult ESL education who have direct experience to draw from and can test new ideas in their classrooms.

The organization and structure of a study circle depends on several variables.

Size of the group

It is important to have enough people involved (6–12) to be able to break into at least two smaller groups at times to allow for varied discussion formats and group dynamics. A small-group size of 3 or 4 people is ideal for supporting equal participation in discussion. In groups larger than that, it is common for some members to become observers rather than participants. The facilitator needs to take into account the time needed to move in and out of small groups and to allow for reporting from those groups.

Time allotted

If the group is unable to meet for the full session time (1.5–2 hours), the facilitator needs to trim the agenda. It is usually preferable to cut out a full activity than to rush each activity to fit them all in. Where possible, it is a good idea to include the group in resolving this issue, as participants may agree to move an activity to another session, do it as a homework activity, or even stay beyond the scheduled time.

Experience of the participants

The study circle guides are written for groups with mixed levels of experience. For groups with limited experience, the facilitator may need to supplement the participants' experience with examples gathered from other educators or call more upon participants' experience as learners (rather than as educators).

Groups of more experienced educators may want to fully investigate theory or research by supplementing the readings with additional articles or original research reports.

Workplace of the participants

When participants all come from one program, there are added opportunities to collaborate by observing each others' classes, planning joint investigation of a strategy, or working together on program-level changes. When participants come from different programs, the facilitator should be mindful of clustering people purposefully (e.g., cross-program groups for generating ideas and strategies and same-program groups for planning program interventions).

Roles and Responsibilities of Study Circle Participants

For a study circle to go smoothly, various roles and responsibilities need to be carried out. The central roles are those of facilitator, program administrator, and participant.

Facilitators

It is the facilitator's job to create an environment in which all feel comfortable participating and to engage participants in reflection that helps them connect theory and research to their own experience. With guidance from the study circle guides, the facilitator supports participants in learning from the research, their own practice, and one another; in making their own discoveries; and in drawing their own conclusions. Following are some guidelines for facilitators.

Before the first session

- Provide programs with information about the study circle (e.g., the purpose, focus, and duration of the study circle).
- Communicate with program administrators about the recruitment of participants, logistical arrangements (e.g., time, place), and possible follow-up activities.
- Send out a prereading packet that includes the goals and agenda for the study circle, the research readings, and expectations of the participants. Limit the length of the readings to four or five pages each and give participants a task, such as noting their own thoughts, questions, or reactions as they read.

During the session

- Agree on some basic ground rules for the group. Ground rules help establish a respectful environment in which everyone can be heard. Following are suggested ground rules:
    - Try not to interrupt others.
    - Work to understand others' perspectives.
    - Avoid generalizations; speak from personal experience.
    - Avoid judgments, either negative or positive.
    - Respect our limited time; try not to repeat what has already been said.
- Model a spirit of inquiry, seeking to truly understand each person's views.
- Encourage participants to think like researchers and to explore why they believe what they believe.
- Invite quieter participants into the conversation so that many voices can be heard.
- Allow participants to talk in pairs or small groups before whole-group discussions to give people a chance to refine their ideas before sharing them more publicly.
- Provide opportunities for participants to express their thoughts or ideas about something without any dialogue until all have spoken.
- Appreciate that silences might allow necessary thinking time; avoid jumping in to fill them.
- Minimize your own participation in discussion. Beware of turning the discussion into a dialogue between you and each speaker.
- Keep the discussion on track, gently pulling the group back to the topic when it has strayed.

- Remind participants of the ground rules when necessary.
- End the session on time unless you have negotiated a change with the group.

See the end of this section for resources to support study circle facilitators.

Program Administrators

The program administrator lays the groundwork for a successful study group by

- Inviting participation and making participation possible by addressing barriers (e.g., providing release time and substitutes for classes)
- Clearly communicating information about the study group
- Supporting the sharing and implementation of what is learned in the group by providing time for discussion at staff meetings, encouraging peer observation, or otherwise supporting change
- Offering follow-up staff discussion to consider program-level changes

Participants

Participation in a study group should be voluntary. Those who attend should

- Do the assigned prereading
- Participate in developing and following group ground rules
- Participate fully (e.g., attend all sessions, try out new strategies between sessions)

Developing the Agenda

CAELA study circle guides, although tailored to specific topics, all follow a similar sequence of activities. The general flow of each session is as follows:

- Opening activities (welcome, introductions, purpose, agenda, expectations)
- Thinking about participants' own experiences, interests, or questions related to the topic
- Understanding and interpreting the theory and research
- Identifying theory and research-based strategies that participants would like to apply
- Applying strategies in practice (between sessions)
- Sharing, reflecting on, and evaluating the application

- Planning next steps
- Closing activities

This model can help you create your own study circles for new research materials. Below are suggested activities that you can draw from to effectively carry out each part of the process. The intention is not to squeeze in all of the activities, but rather to select the ones that will best move your particular group through the entire cycle. Choose the ones that suit the needs of your participants, the material, and your time frame. For example, if your readings reflect a strong consensus in the field, you wouldn't use the activity that invites examination of "competing theories." Similarly, if you are working with a group of new instructors, you might not choose activities that focus participants on analyzing their own past teaching experiences.

First Session

Thinking about participants' own experiences, interests, or questions related to the topic

- If there is time, use an ice breaker that connects the topic of the study circle with participants' knowledge and experiences; for example, have participants share one note they made to themselves as they were reading the material or one point that resonated with them as language *learners*.
- Do a brainstorm of questions the group has about the topic.
- Have them talk in pairs about their own experiences (as a teacher or learner) related to the topic.
- Have them talk in small groups about "Why is this topic important? Why does it matter?"
- Have them discuss any of the strategies they already use or have tried.

Understanding and interpreting the theory and research

- Use the topic headings in the materials to divide the text and create topic-focused groups. Give the groups time to review their sections, and then, on flipcharts, have them write the main points of the research in one column and the implications for practice in another. Invite them to discuss and add additional implications they might see. Then post the flipcharts and have participants walk around the room to see what other groups have written. Invite participants to add new ideas they might have as they read the lists of implications for practice. Then discuss any questions that have arisen or general observations.
- In groups, use discussion questions to help participants consider the value of the research they have read about. Questions might include the following:
    - How would you summarize these ideas for someone else?

- In what ways is what you read in keeping with what you expected?
- Is what you read consistent with your own experience (as a teacher or a learner)? How or how not?
- What in the material was new to you?
- What new questions were raised by what you read?
- How well does what you read describe common practice in programs? What evidence of ideas presented do you see in your program?

- Select a complex or provocative quote from the reading and discuss what it means and whether or not people agree with it.
- If competing theories are described, you might
    - Have participants group themselves according to the one they prefer and discuss why, then present their reasons to the larger group.
    - Using statements that reflect the various perspectives, do an agree/disagree/not sure activity, where participants walk to different parts of the room depending on what they think of the statement.
    - Play “doubters and believers,” during which one team generates all the reasons to doubt a theory and one team generates the reasons to believe it. This helps a group examine the theory deeply.

Identifying theory/research-based strategies participants would like to apply

- Use writing to get participants to reflect on which aspects of the research, or which suggested applications, they feel confident using in their practice and which they don’t.
- Discuss the relevance of suggested strategies for various ESL populations/levels and have participants choose one that makes sense for their students.

Between Sessions: Applying Strategies in Practice

- Before trying a new strategy, have participants predict and write about what they think will happen. (See the New Activity Planning Form at the end of this section.)
- If possible, have them organize peer observations with a colleague, looking specifically at the application of the new strategy in the classroom and how it affects the students. (See the Peer Observation Form at the end of this section.)
- Have participants make notes about what they are trying and what happens. (See the New Notes Form at the end of this section.)

Second Session

Sharing, reflecting on, and evaluating the application

- Have participants discuss how their results compared to their predictions.
- Have participants meet in groups to discuss what happened and document factors that affect implementation.
- Have participants meet in groups by level of students in their classes to discuss what happened and document factors that affect implementation.
- Have participants write about or discuss the promises and challenges of applying the research they are reading about.

Planning next steps

- Discuss supports and barriers to implementing change.
- Discuss, “What are some of the implications of applying the theory and research reviewed in this material? For example, what changes might be tried in your agency or program?”
- Then, “Which of the above implications for change do you rate as your top three choices? What is the reason for your rankings?”
- Have participants consider how they might continue to support each other as a group. Does the group want to meet again or stay in touch in other ways, such as through a practice group, a discussion board, or a blog? If the group wants to continue to meet, make sure that there is a clear purpose and focus for the meetings. What do they want more time to talk about?

Closing activities

- Evaluate the session (or the entire study circle). (See the Evaluation Form at the end of this section.)
- Ask permission to disseminate a group contact list (and give people a chance to opt out).
- Draw participants’ attention to other resources available on the study topic. (See Additional Resources at the end of this section.)
- Thank the group for their work.

Follow-Up

- Facilitate the study circle's next steps by helping to organize additional meetings and online communication, identifying additional readings, and so on.
- Disseminate the group contact list.
- Send out any notes or other group documents that were promised.

Additional Resources

See *Focus on Basics* (www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=31) for articles that discuss research and practice. For study circle groups that are reading original research reports, more time would be needed. See the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) study guides at www.ncsall.net/index.php?id=769

See, also, CALPRO for guidance on single-session discussion groups at www.calpro-online.org/pubs/DiscGuideResPubs.pdf

For additional tips for facilitating a study circle, look online at any of the following NCSALL study guides, available from www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/lp_f.pdf

KEY FACILITATION SKILLS

GOOD STUDY CIRCLE FACILITATORS

IMPORTANCE OF NEUTRALITY

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION FACILITATION

DEALING WITH TYPICAL CHALLENGES

RESOURCE BRIEF: LEADING A STUDY CIRCLE

New Activity Planning Form

1. What research finding, theoretical principle, or strategy are you planning to implement in your classroom in a specific activity?

2. Why did you choose this activity? What impact or outcomes are you hoping to see?

3. What contextual factors (e.g., class size, student levels, content focus) will you have to take into account as you plan this activity?

4. How will you implement this activity? What will you do?

5. What signs will you look for to know if the activity is having an impact on your students?

Peer Observation Form

1. What you're looking for

2. What you observe

3. Discussion of observations with teacher

New Activity Notes

1. Describe the activity you implemented. What happened? What did you observe?

2. What struck you as interesting about what happened? How did it compare with what you expected?

3. What impact did the activity have on the students or on the program?

4. Did the activity give you the information you were looking for? What else might you do to get additional information?

5. What did you learn about the research, theory, or strategy you were testing?

6. What did you get out of the experience of applying theory and research to your practice?

Evaluation Form

1. How useful did you find the study circle material? Please explain.

2. How useful did you find the study circle meetings? Please explain.

3. How useful did you find the new activity or strategy that you tried (including the documentation)? Please explain.

4. What tools or ideas are you taking away that you will continue to use in your practice?

5. In what ways are you going to continue to apply research in your practice?

6. If this study circle were offered again, what advice would you give the facilitator?

7. On what other topics would you like to have a study circle?

How to Conduct Peer Coaching and Mentoring

What Are Peer Coaching and Mentoring?

Peer coaching is a nonevaluative relationship between peers in which there is mutual learning through sharing, reflection, classroom observation, feedback, shared analysis, and support. For teachers, it is an opportunity for colleagues to work together over time to build their knowledge, reflect on their practice, and try new strategies. It traditionally includes a period of learning together through collaborative lesson planning, strategizing, and problem solving, followed by observation of each other's teaching. It may also focus on topics beyond the classroom, such as ways to expand student involvement in a program or ways to design workshops.

Mentoring is a similarly nonevaluative relationship between an experienced, skilled practitioner and one or more less experienced, less skilled practitioners. Both peer coaching and mentoring use similar activities, require comparable support for participants, and aim to deepen teachers' understanding of theories and approaches by taking a focused, shared look at their own practice.

The key difference between the two approaches is that in mentoring, the mentor is chosen because of his or her expertise in a particular area that has been identified as an interest or need of the practitioner. The content focus is usually determined before the mentor and practitioner start their work together. Although they will learn from each other, it is assumed that the mentor has experience and wisdom that can be used to guide learning in the topic area.

In peer coaching, however, the participants usually have the same level of experience and expertise. The focus area may also be predetermined (when, for example, peer coaching is used as a way to follow up a workshop or training), or it may be more open ended (as part of ongoing, inquiry-based professional development within a program).

Why Use Peer Coaching and Mentoring?

Both peer coaching and mentoring build on adult learning theory and incorporate practices supported by research on teacher change. Peer coaching and mentoring

- Build on practitioners' knowledge and experience
- Have participants work collaboratively to identify areas of focus and ways to learn
- Provide options and choices in a participant-directed process
- Use a problem-solving approach to learning rather than a decontextualized skills approach
- Provide opportunities to reflect on what is being learned and how it applies to practice

- Focus on areas that are relevant to the practitioner
- Have clear goals and objectives and a plan for reaching them

A report that summarizes the literature on teacher change (Smith, Hofer, Gillespie, Solomon, & Rowe, 2003) notes the following practices, which are part of peer coaching and mentoring:

- The effectiveness of any given professional development activity depends upon how well teachers can tie what they learned in professional development back to their own work situation (Fingeret & Cockley, 1992).
- Professional development should include a strong emphasis on analysis and reflection rather than just demonstration of techniques (Guskey, 1997, 1999; Sparks, 1994, 1995). Teachers need to know when and why to use a strategy or technique, not just how (Joyce, 1983).
- Professional development should include a variety of activities, such as discussion of theory and research, demonstration, practice, feedback, and classroom application (Joyce & Showers, 1995; Joyce, Wolf, & Calhoun, 1995; Mazzarella, 1980).
- Teachers are more likely to learn by observing practice and through trial and error in their own classes than from decontextualized examples (Elmore, 1996).

Organizing Peer Coaching or Mentoring Projects

Peer coaching or mentoring projects can be developed on the state, regional, or local program levels. Although the size of the project may vary, someone should be assigned to coordinate the smooth flow of activities, check in with the pairs or groups, and facilitate the initial orientation and closing session. The process of organizing and implementing peer coaching or mentoring projects involves the following steps:

1. Identify the purpose.
2. Design the approach.
3. Select participants (peer coaches, mentors, and mentored teachers).
4. Prepare and support participants.
5. Develop and implement plans.
6. Evaluate the process and plan next steps.

1. Identify the purpose

The first step is to clarify the program goals and ways that peer coaching or mentoring will address them. The goals may have emerged from a program self-assessment, funder mandates (e.g., curriculum aligned with standards, standards for instructor competencies), program changes, individual or program professional development plans, staff needs assessment, or staff turnover.

Common purposes for using peer coaching or mentoring include the following:

- Implementing newly mandated activities
- Assisting new teachers
- Addressing weaknesses that have been identified through needs assessments and program reviews
- Building a reflective learning community of practitioners
- Building program capacity to deliver new services
- Following up professional development (such as a workshop, study circle)

2. Design the approach

Table 2 summarizes the factors to consider in designing an effective approach.

Table 2. Factors to Consider in Designing Effective Peer Coaching or Mentoring

Factor	Considerations
Budget: How many participants can the budget cover for their time on the project? For how many hours each?	• Compensation for planning, implementation, and evaluation of activities • Hiring substitutes (or other ways of covering classes while participants observe others)
Inclusion: Will this project be program-based, or will it recruit across programs?	• Program-based projects build a learning community within a program, and coordination may be easier. However, unless the program is large, finding needed expertise in a mentor may be difficult. • Cross-program projects expose practitioners to more varied experiences and resources and provide a larger pool from which to draw mentors. However, distance and schedules may complicate coordination of meetings.
Grouping: Will the work be done in pairs or in small groups?	• Pairs provide individualized attention to participant needs, and coordination of schedules is less complicated than for a group. Matching must be done carefully so that partners are compatible. (One option is for the practitioner to choose the mentor.) Partners need to be able to stop working together if their collaboration is not productive. • Groups allow for consideration of more perspectives and ideas, and they rely less on individual relationships. In mentoring, a mentor may have limited availability to observe multiple participants.

Factor	Considerations
Scope: How broad will the content focus be (e.g., for the topic of reading instruction, will the approach apply a particular strategy, or will it use more open inquiry)?	• A narrow focus may be useful in following up professional development on a specific strategy or approach, or for new teachers who are not sure where to start. • A broader scope may be useful for experienced teachers who have their own particular questions about the topic.
Time frame: How many hours per week will be devoted to this project, and for how many weeks or months?	• The time frame is based on the project purpose and the program's calendar. • Narrowly focused projects usually need less time than broadly focused projects. All should include at least a kick-off orientation meeting, two classroom observations, and a meeting to reflect on and evaluate the process.

3. Select participants

Mentors can be identified through recommendations or an application process, or they may be informally selected by colleagues who would like to work with them. Depending on the purpose of the project, mentored teachers may be identified either through a needs assessment or self-selected by interest. In some programs, all instructors participate.

Table 3 summarizes the qualities of a good mentor.

Table 3. The Qualities of a Good Mentor

Skill/Knowledge Area	Characteristics of Mentor
Interpersonal	Is patient, open, self-confident, empathetic
Communication	Can read verbal and nonverbal cues, presents ideas constructively, knows the difference between evaluative and nonevaluative feedback
Listening	Is an active listener, can hear what is not said as well as what is said, is open to feedback
Content	Has extensive experience and expertise in content area, broad knowledge of the field, keeps up with current trends and research, doesn't feel the need to know the answers to all questions
Awareness of diversity	Recognizes differences in communication styles and learning styles, has awareness of his or her own communication and learning styles, is open to feedback
Reflective	Is self-reflective, has strong observational skills, helps participants reflect and make connections (to their own experiences, to other knowledge), encourages participants to articulate their thinking and reasoning

From Sherman, J., Voight, J., Tibbits, J. Dobbins, D., Evans, A., & Weidler D. (2000). *Adult educators' guide to designing instructor mentoring*. Washington, DC: Pelavin Research Institute. Adapted with permission.

In addition to these qualities, participants in peer coaching and mentoring ideally share three characteristics: They want to participate in the process, they are open to change, and they are able to articulate their needs and preferences.

Participants in peer coaching need the same skills and knowledge as those in mentoring, although they may not have the extensive content knowledge that mentors have.

4. Prepare and support participants

To prepare participants to engage fully in the project, it is important to have an orientation meeting in which the project is outlined and everyone is included in setting the expectations and procedures. An orientation might include these topics:

- The purpose of the project
- Roles and responsibilities (See Guidelines for Mentoring and Classroom Observation at the end of this section.)
- Support for participants
- Planning the learning activities
- Giving and receiving nonjudgmental feedback (See Rules for Peer Coaching at the end of this section.)
- Observation techniques for data collection (See Ways to Gather Information During Classroom Observations at the end of this section.)
- Recognizing and working across differences (For strategies for dealing with cross-cultural communication challenges, see DuPraw & Axner, 2003.)
- Evaluation: what a successful project will look like

By supporting teachers engaged in peer coaching or mentoring, administrators can send the message that this work is valued. There are a number of ways to support participants in peer coaching and mentoring projects. A primary means is compensation for formal meetings and observations, as well as for informal tasks such as prepping a substitute teacher or corresponding with a peer or mentor about a coaching or mentoring issue. Support is usually provided in the form of paid substitutes, release time, or stipends.

In addition, there should be ongoing opportunities for evaluation and mechanisms through which problems or challenges can be addressed. For example, if a mentor project is large enough to have several mentors working at the same time, the project might include time for additional meetings between the mentors and the mentored to share experiences or solve problems. In a peer coaching project, a project coordinator can check in periodically with the coaches to see how their collaboration is doing and to make sure that their communication is clear and open.

5. Develop and implement plans

This step involves a series of three substeps: Identify a focus question, learn about the topic, and observe the classroom application.

Identify a focus question

Whether the content focus of the project has been narrowly or broadly defined, participants will need to find a particular aspect or question that they want to investigate in their own practice. This happens most effectively through discussion of the topic with colleagues, where practitioners can revise their goals and questions as they listen to others.

If the project is following up a workshop or study circle, questions might already have been identified in the action plans that were developed at the close of those professional development activities, or they might emerge from discussion of ideas or strategies that participants learned during those activities but have yet to try out.

If the project is responding to weaknesses identified through a program or staff needs assessment, the participants may need to do some reading first to expand their understanding of current research and practice. Mentors might guide discussion of these new ideas and their applications to the classroom before helping participants hone their questions.

If the project is being used to support practitioner-directed, inquiry-based professional development, participants may have a lot of leeway in choosing their focus topic. They may select a shared question to investigate in their varied classrooms or develop a question specific to their situation and students.

Learn about the topic

Based on the focus questions, participants in a mentoring or peer coaching project work together to develop a plan to learn more about the topic from each other and from outside resources. The plan should include the following:

- **The topic of inquiry:** What questions about our practice are we going to explore?
- **Learning activities:** What activities will we engage in to build knowledge and understanding? (See the list below for possible activities.)
- **Evidence:** What information will we collect to help us answer the questions?

The purpose of the mentoring or peer coaching relationship is for practitioners to help each other be successful in the classroom. It should involve learning activities that build practitioners' understanding of theory and research, as well as their confidence to develop or apply new strategies in practice. In addition to classroom observations, the following activities might be useful learning tools. (The extent to which participants can engage in these activities will depend on the budget and scope of the project.)

- Participants read and discuss articles on a specific topic.

- Mentors model teaching strategies or techniques, as well as their reflections on those activities.
- Colleagues do an observation together (of a teacher or a video demonstration) and discuss their feedback together.
- Participants critique a case study together or review curriculum materials.
- Peer coaches attend a professional development activity together and debrief what they learned.
- Mentors and teachers collaborate on a work task (e.g., designing a workshop or developing a lesson plan).
- Participants do reflective writing about their focus topic (e.g., what they already know, what they want to know more about, how they want to apply it in their work, what changes they hope to see).
- Mentors or peers observe classroom instruction, gathering data that will help teachers reflect on their practice.

Observe the classroom application

A mentoring or peer coaching project should include at least two observations, allowing instructors to use the feedback from earlier observations or try a different approach. First observations can be stressful for instructors, and they may feel distracted or self-conscious. Follow-up observations provide opportunities for them to make adaptations and see the changes that can result from their intentional revisions.

Classroom observations are the most challenging part of peer coaching or mentoring, because they require good planning and skill in nonjudgmental observation and feedback. There are three steps to the observation process (see Teacher Preparation for Classroom Observation at the end of this section.): preobservation planning of what to observe and how, the observation, and postobservation debriefing of the lesson.

Preobservation planning. The preobservation meeting should take place shortly before the observation so that the teacher has a finalized lesson plan to work from. The meeting requires about 1 hour of uninterrupted time.

In the preobservation meeting, mentors and teachers discuss what the mentor should look for during the observation (and how he or she should conduct the observation) to provide information that will help the teacher answer the inquiry questions. (See Focus Areas and Sample Questions for Classroom Observations and Preobservation Questions at the end of this section.) From their work together, observers should already have a good idea of what the teacher wants to focus on. Details (such as how the observer will be introduced) should have been worked out earlier, so that the meeting can focus on how this particular lesson will be observed. (See Ways to Gather Information During Classroom Observations at the end of this section.)

Observation. During the observation, the mentor or peer coach should take clear, nonevaluative notes on what he or she has agreed to observe.

Postobservation debriefing. The postobservation meeting should take place right after the observation so that the event is fresh in the minds of both partners. The meeting requires another hour of uninterrupted time.

During the postobservation meeting, it is useful to start with the instructor's sense of how the class went. Some teachers feel a need to start by stating what didn't go well or ways they felt they made "mistakes." Although they need an opportunity to get this off their chests, this kind of self-criticism should not frame the discussion. Stick to the postobservation questions (see Postobservation Questions at the end of this section) and steer the conversation back to a nonjudgmental discussion of what happened in the class. Remind yourselves of the purpose of the collaboration.

Use the observation notes on student learning to anchor the conversation. Look over the notes and interpret the data together, discussing what you learned from the students.

6. Evaluate the process and plan next steps

At the end of the project, it is useful to have a wrap-up meeting during which participants can share what they have learned and articulate how they will build upon it. In addition, this is a time to evaluate the project itself—the structure, the supports, and the results—and to consider what longer-term consequences you will look for to evaluate its impact. Teachers may decide to continue observing each other periodically, or they may use the observation protocol to structure self-observations that they can document and review over time.

One of the aims of peer coaching and mentoring is to support a culture of reflection and to develop the habit of using data to inform practice. It can be helpful to return to this goal to frame discussions of the next steps.

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Resources on Setting Up a Mentoring Process

The following resources provide more detailed information about setting up and conducting a mentoring process.

National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (2004). *NCSALL mentor teacher group guide (AMI).* Cambridge, MA: Author. Available from www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/mentor_a.pdf

Smith, C., Hofer, J., Gillespie, M., Solomon, M., & Rowe, K. (2003). *How teachers change: A study of professional development in adult education.* Cambridge, MA: National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. Available from: www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/research/report25.pdf

Sherman, J., Voight, J., Tibbits, J. Dobbins, D., Evans, A., & Weidler D. (2000). *Adult educators' guide to designing instructor mentoring.* Washington, DC: Pelavin Research Institute.

Guidelines for Mentoring and Classroom Observation

Mentoring is

- thinking and learning together with a colleague,
- problem solving, or
- offering suggestions.

Mentoring is not

- supervision,
- evaluation, or
- giving someone the answer.

Classroom observations are

- based on one issue in the class;
- designed to collect information about what happens related to that issue;
- focused on learning, not teaching (i.e., focused on how well students are learning, not how well the teacher is teaching);
- confidential between mentor teacher and participant teacher; and
- conducted with students' awareness and permission.

Classroom observations are not

- opportunities to coteach,
- opportunities for the observer to form opinions about all aspects of teaching and learning in the class, or
- formally documented for others' review.

From National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. (2004). *NCSALL Mentor Teacher Group Guide (AMI),* Appendix A: "Handout C: Guidelines for Mentoring and Classroom Observation." Cambridge, MA: Author. Available from www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/mentor_a.pdf

Adapted with permission.

Rules for Peer Coaching

The Stance

- We're engaging in exploration, not criticism. We're unraveling a mystery (teaching and learning) together, not monitoring each other.
- An observed lesson is a shared resource; both teacher and coach should take something of value away from any discussion of it.
- Look for, describe, and assess the practice and its results, not the person's competence.

The Talk

- Describe first, discuss details later. First describe what happened, using your data. Only then discuss what the results were, and only if the teacher initiates the discussion.
- Talk specifically and concretely. Say, "You called on Will three times," rather than "You tend to call on men a lot."
- Talk about things that can be changed and are worth changing. Ignore personal mannerisms, unless they are interfering with student learning.
- Remember to comment on strengths. Important learning comes from building on our strengths as well as from addressing areas of weakness.
- Check to ensure clear communication. Paraphrase a lot. Say, "Are you saying that…?" "Let me see if I understand you…"
- Interact. The basic human interaction skills of attending, listening, responding, and acknowledging are important for both the coach and the teacher.

From National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. (2004). *NCSALL Mentor Teacher Group Guide (AMI),* Appendix A: "Handout C: Guidelines for Mentoring and Classroom Observation." Cambridge, MA: Author. Available from www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/mentor_a.pdf

Adapted with permission.

Ways to Gather Information During Classroom Observations

Quotes: Word-for-word record of what individual students or the teacher say. For example, the observer records the exact wording of how the teacher asks questions and how a particular learner responds, keeps note of the questions that students ask, and records the exact conversation between specific students.

Anecdotal notes: Descriptions of events or interactions that occur during the class. For example, the observer records what happens among students when the teacher leaves the classroom, or records the behaviors and conversation between students as they negotiate how to work in small groups.

Participation map: A written or visual description of who talks with whom. The observer describes interactions as fully as possible, mapping who initiates the conversation, who responds, who follows, who is silent, who is addressed, and who is left out.

Counting: A record of the number of times a particular event occurs (e.g., the number of times the teacher interrupts a student, the number of times students interrupt one another, the number of times students initiate a discussion, and the number of times there are periods of silence).

Tracking time: A record of how much time is spent on a particular event or activity (e.g., the amount of time students talk informally versus on task, the amount of time the teacher speaks versus the students speak, the amount of time students have to quietly reflect, and the amount of time students have to work with one another).

Following one student: A record of a particular student's behaviors and participation (e.g., what activities engage him/her, how he/she responds to being called upon, and how much he/she participates in small-group work).

From National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. (2004). *NCSALL Mentor Teacher Group Guide (AMI),* Appendix B: "Ways to Gather Information During Class Observations." Cambridge, MA: Author. Available from www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/mentor_a.pdf

Adapted with permission.

Teacher Preparation for Classroom Observation

Take the time to consider these questions and points between now and the time of your classroom observation. You and your mentor teacher will discuss your ideas about these questions during the preobservation conference.

- Before the classroom observation, what do you want to tell learners about who is coming and why? How would you like the mentor teacher to be introduced during the class? What else might you need to do to prepare learners for the mentor teacher's visit? (Note: Let students know that the information being gathered is to help you to learn about your own teaching, and not for any other purposes.)
- What questions or concerns do you have about the classroom observation?
- What activity or activities do you plan to do during the class that will be observed?
- Rather than focusing on everything related to your teaching or on the activity you will be doing, the mentor teacher will focus on and collect information about one specific part of the class related to how the students are learning. For example, the mentor might focus on how students participate in the class or how well they seem to understand the activities. What would you like the mentor teacher to focus on during the class?
- It is difficult to predict what will happen on any given day. For example, on the day of the observation, too few learners might come to class for you to do the planned activity. Do you have a Plan B?
- How do you want the mentor teacher to be involved in the class during the observation? Do you want him or her to observe from a distance, sit with learners, or participate in activities but not coteach?
- Do you have any questions for the mentor teacher about the observation?

Any questions you still have about the process can be discussed during your preobservation conference.

From National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. (2004). *NCSALL Mentor Teacher Group Guide (AMI),* Appendix C: "Handout G: Preparation for Classroom Observation." Cambridge, MA: Author. Available from www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/mentor_a.pdf

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Focus Areas and Sample Questions for Classroom Observations

Classroom Arrangement

- What is the set-up of the desks and chairs? How far do students sit from each other? From the teacher?
- What is on the walls? What resources (e.g., technological, books) are available in the room?
- Is there a lot of noise in the room? Are there interruptions from outside the room?
- Are the chairs comfortable? Is there enough lighting and workspace in the room?
- Where do people choose to sit? (Does it change over time?)

Classroom Management/Authority

- What is the classroom agenda? Who sets it, and how is it set? When a question is asked or a topic raised that diverges from the agenda, what is the response by the teacher? By students?
- What is the daily routine (e.g., signing in, signing out)?
- What are the classroom rules? Who decides them? How are they communicated?
- How do participants address each other (by name, by title)?
- In what configurations do students work—individually, as a whole group, or in small groups?

Learner Engagement/Sense of Community

- How much movement is there in the classroom? What kind?
- How busy are students, and what are they doing?
- How do learners elicit help—by asking another student, raising their hand, waiting for the teacher to circulate?

Learner/Classroom Talk

- What kinds of questions do learners ask? How often?
- What kinds of answers do learners give? How long are their responses?
- Are there differences in the amount of learner talk across these variables: male/female, native/nonnative English speaker, age, etc.?
- What is the interaction pattern: one person talking at a time, many people at one time, or a mix? Who regulates this pattern? How is turn-taking managed? How often do learners initiate new topics or other opinions?

From National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. (2004). *NCSALL Mentor Teacher Group Guide (AMI),* Appendix B: "Focus Areas and Sample Questions." Cambridge, MA: Author. Available from www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/mentor_a.pdf

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Preobservation Questions

What specifically do you want me to look for?

What do you want me to know about the class?

Is there a particular student you would like me to watch?

What do you have planned for the lesson?

What are your objectives and expectations for the lesson?

Postobservation Questions

How do you think the lesson went? Explain what makes you think this.

How does this compare with what you expected would happen?

What could be some reasons it happened this way?

Would you like me to share what I observed?

How do you want to use what you're learning from this observation process?

What else would you like to try?

From National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy. (2004). *NCSALL Mentor Teacher Group Guide (AMI),* Appendix B: "Pre-Observation Questions and Post-Observation Questions." Cambridge, MA: Author. Available from www.ncsall.net/fileadmin/resources/teach/mentor_a.pdf

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Notes