

INFORMAL EDUCATION AS A SOURCE OF TEACHER DEVELOPMENT

A rapidly changing learner population, education reforms, and the development of national standards are placing a number of new demands and requirements on language teachers, which make continuing professional development crucial. Modern education makes a distinction between formal in-service training and informal teacher professional development. Formal in-service training adapts too slowly to the new changes in society as it is organized "from top to bottom", all the courses being provided by employers and the state. Informal education, in its turn, is organized by teachers themselves and is identified through a bottom-up approach [2, c. 5].

There are three main reasons why informal education may be needed. First, it may be that some situations need a deeper understanding of the particular issue or wider range of skills than many of teachers and educators develop in their day to day lives. Thanks to reflection and training teachers can become sophisticated facilitators in their sphere. They can also develop a certain wisdom about people and situations because of the opportunities they have [1, c. 7].

Second, it may be that specialists do not have the time to spend exchanging and learning with other teachers in the ways they wish or need. Educators may not have a chance to engage in the sorts of activities and discussions they find fulfilling. Informal education can help here. Specialists can work from home and deal with different issues on different levels.

Third, a good deal of the work that informal specialists engage in is with other professionals. For example, informal educators working in a typical school will have to spend a lot of their time deepening and extending the understanding and orientation of teachers and other staff. Furthermore, there can be a narrowing of educational focus. In some cases specialists in the sphere of informal education may be appointed to work with students, they also have to encourage and educate staff so that the needs of students can be recognized and met [1, c. 7]. To do this teachers will often need both to develop a detailed understanding of the particular situation or issue, and have some sort of specific professional qualification.

Informal professional activities, such as discussion, talks or presentations, advice and guidance, are carried out in a flexible way in informal situations. Other forms of informal knowledge transfer include a spontaneous meeting on the Internet or in real time, instant messaging, a scheduled Web-based meeting with colleagues and a phone call to someone who has information you need. Informal professional development allows teachers to focus on specific professional and

personal needs, to feel internal responsibility for the result of the professional development, to be engaged in new professional activities and to adapt to the rapidly changing modern world. Informal learning keeps teachers vibrant, mentally active and interested in their own professional development and in the world around them.

REFERENCES

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