Adult Development, Teacher Development, and Adult Learning
ADULT DEVELOPMENT, TEACHER DEVELOPMENT, AND ADULT LEARNING

The traditional structure of professional development for teachers is a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, where all teachers, regardless of their differences, are provided the same professional development (Colbert, Brown, Choi, & Thomas, 2008; Grossman & Hirsch, 2009; Lee, 2005; Little, 1993; Marsh & Jordan-Marsh, 1985). Colbert et al. (2008) refer to this form of professional development as “the ‘sit and get’ model, which imposes professional development on teachers in a top-down, non-collaborative manner” (p. 136). The research of Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, and Orphanos (2009) found that “more than 9 out of 10 U.S. teachers have participated in professional learning consisting of short-term conferences or workshops” (p. 5). Despite the popularity and common use of traditional forms of professional development in school districts across the nation, these forms are heavily criticized in the literature on professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2005, 2010; Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Hirsh, 2009; Kelleher, 2003; Lester, 2003; Little, 1993; Richardson, 2003; Sparks & Hirsh, 2000).

This criticism is based on the idea that in traditional ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches, all teachers receive the same professional development program regardless of their individual subject area, grade level, level of experience, or needs. Watts (1980) equated this to a generic antibiotic that is given to all patients regardless of their illness or even if they are ill at all. A major issue in this ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach is that although teachers share a common link with regard to their overall profession as a teacher, they represent a diverse spectrum of ages, experience levels, subjects and grade levels taught, personalities, and ethnicities. The literature on human development suggests that individuals represent multiple levels and stages of adult development (Erikson, 1980; Kegan, 1982; Wilber, 2000; 2001), as well as teacher and career development (Fuller, 1969; Burden, 1982; Burke, Fessler, & Christensen, 1984; Christensen, Burke, Fessler, & Hagstrom, 1983; Dubble, 1998; Katz, 1972; Watts, 1980). Additionally, when teachers participate in professional development practices, they come with a propensity for particular, individual adult learning processes (Chickering, 2006; Cranton & King, 2003; Daley, 2003; Grow, 1994; Lawler, 2003; Lieberman, 1995; Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007; Quick, Holtzman, & Chaney, 2009; Trotter, 2006). Due to this diversity in developmental levels and adult learning processes, for professional development to be more effective, it should be individualized and differentiated to fit their needs and developmental levels (Burden, 1982; Burke et al., 1984; Christensen et al. 1983; Daley, 2003; Dubble, 1998; Eun, 2008; Grossman & Hirsch, 2009; Guskey, 1991; Helsing, Howell, Kegan, & Lahey, 2008; Lawler, 2003; Lynn, 2002; McDonnell, Christensen, & Price, 1989; Oja, 1990; Quick et al., 2009; Sheerer, 1997; Trotter, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2011; Watts, 1980; Zepeda, 2008). This ideal of individualized and differentiated professional development for teachers is typically not addressed within traditional forms of professional development.

This article examines the literature on human development, teacher development, and adult learning processes. The focus is on developing a better understanding of why professional development needs to be individualized and differentiated to fit each educator’s needs and preferred learning styles. When professional development is individualized, it provides the
greatest opportunity for the learning that takes place to make a difference in the lives of the learner. The goal of this article is for teachers and administrators to gather evidence for effective decision-making on future professional development programs and processes.

**The Teacher as a Diverse and Developing Adult Learner**

The focus of this article is on avoiding the ‘one-size-fits-all’ forms of professional development. The constructs of effective professional development should center on the ideal that teachers are individuals who come to professional development opportunities with individual needs, goals, practices, and belief systems. However what is espoused in the literature in terms of the individualization in professional development practices is not always followed through in the implementation of professional development. Lieberman (1995) addresses this point in the following manner:

*What everyone appears to want for students – a wide array of learning opportunities that engage students in experiences, creating, and solving real problems, using their own experiences, and working with others – is for some reason denied to teachers when they are learners.* (p. 591)

As Lieberman points out, it is commonplace within the education system to recognize the diversity of students in terms of individual learning processes, developmental levels, and previous knowledge and to address these differences through differentiated instruction. The same recognition, however, is not always provided to teachers within professional development programs regarding their diversity of adult learning processes and developmental levels. In so much of adult learning – to which the professional development of teachers fits – the learners are treated like “empty bottles on the assembly line, passing us by as each of us drops in a few bits of our specialty” (Gates, 1982, p. 93). The problem with this approach is that all teachers, as learners in a professional development setting, are not exact replicas of each other, nor will they all be teaching the same subject to the same students.

Teachers represent a diverse spectrum of adult developmental levels (Beck & Cowan, 2006; Erikson, 1980; Kegan, 1982; Wilber, 2000; 2001) and teacher developmental levels (Fuller, 1969; Burden, 1982; Burke et al., 1984; Christensen et al., 1983; Dubble, 1998; Katz, 1972; Watts, 1980). The literature on professional development espouses the matching of professional development with the individual developmental stages of teachers (Burden, 1982; Burke et al., 1984; Christensen et al. 1983; Daley, 2003; Drago-Severson, 2004; Dubble, 1998; Eun, 2008; Grossman & Hirsch, 2009; Guskey, 1991; Helsing et al., 2008; Lawler, 2003; Lynn, 2002; McDonnell et al., 1989; Oja, 1990; Quick et al., 2009; Sheerer, 1997; Trotter, 2006; U.S. Department of Education, 2011; Watts, 1980). Professional development programs must also recognize teachers as diverse learners with individual sets of learning needs and processes (Chickering, 2006; Cranton & King, 2003; Daley, 2003; Grow, 1994; Lawler, 2003; Lieberman, 1995; Merriam et al., 2007; Quick et al., 2009; Trotter, 2006). The following sections provide information on the theories of teacher development, the role of systems in development, and adult learning processes that can help school leaders to understand the need for individualized and differentiated professional development.
Theories of teacher development

The literature on teacher-specific theories of development centers on the early work of Frances Fuller (1969). Fuller developed a theory based on the stages of concern in a teacher’s career, which has served as a foundation for the researchers who have followed her in this field. According to Watske (2002), Fuller theorized that teachers move through three stages of concerns: self (survival, self-adequacy, and acceptance), task (student performance and teacher duties), and impact (social and educational impact on the system). Similar to Erikson’s (1980) crisis resolution as the means to psychosocial development, Fuller theorized that a teacher could not move to the next stage of concern without first solving the concern of the previous stage (Watske, 2002). As a teacher solved the concerns at each identifiable level of development, the teacher begins to move from self-centered concerns to impact concerns of the larger system. Other theories of teacher development follow a similar pattern to Fuller’s influential theory.

Similar to Fuller’s (1969) theory, the majority of teacher development theories begin with a stage that is focused on survival (Burden, 1982; Burke et al., 1984; Dubble, 1998; Katz, 1972; Watts, 1980). Survival in teacher development theories is a period where teachers are focused on “maintaining classroom control, mastering content, and inspiring the admiration of supervisors” (Christensen et al. 1983, p. 4). According to Watts (1980), teachers at this developmental level are “rigid, insecure, anxious, and intimidated by students, other teachers, and their own expectations for themselves” (p. 3). Dubble (1998) refers to this stage of development as the “neonate” stage where the teacher is like a newborn that is thrust into a new environment that lacks the comfort, safety, and familiarity of the womb, which in this case is the teacher preparation program at the university level. At this point in their development they are in search of technical skills, instructional strategies, and content knowledge that can help them survive in the classroom (Burden, 1982; Christensen et al., 1983; Dubble, 1998; Katz, 1972; Watts, 1980). The theorists suggest that by the end of year one, teachers begin to exit the survival stage as they come to the realization that they can in fact survive.

The theories of teacher development suggest that as teachers move out of the survival stage, their concerns move out of a self-centered state and switch to concerns about their students (Burden, 1982; Fuller, 1969; Katz, 1972). Both Katz (1972) and Dubble (1998) refer to this stage as ‘consolidation’ for it involves the integration of various skills and knowledge into a consistent whole to be used in the classroom. As Dubble asserts, “the result is an integration of practice which is manifested as a natural flow in the classroom” (p. 6). It is in this stage that the theorists suggest that teachers are open to trying new methods and strategies as they no longer harbor the concern of survival.

It is in the third stage of development that some of the teacher-specific developmental theories begin to differentiate from each other. For some of the theorists, including Fuller (1969), Burden (1982), and Watts (1980), the third stage is one of mastery where the developmental process reaches its culmination. Each of these theories suggests that this mastery level occurs around the fifth year of teaching. In Fuller’s stages of concern theory, teachers in this stage are concerned with the overall impact of their career as the focus shifts to their impact on the larger school system (Watske, 2002). In the individual theories of Burden and Watts, this stage for teachers is a period of comfort in their role, confidence in their abilities, and command of their classroom environment.
Whereas the theories of Burden (1982), Fuller (1969), and Watts (1980) view this stage as an ending stage of mastery, the theories of Dubble (1998), Katz (1972), and Burke et al. (1984) do not end their theories in the third stage. Both Dubble and Katz call this stage in development the renewal stage while Burke et al. refers to it as the ‘career frustration’ stage which is a crucial point along the developmental process. All three theories posit that this is where teachers become tired, bored, ‘burned out,’ and according to Dubble (1998), are apt to teaching in a “mode of automatic pilot” (p. 6). To move past this stage in their development without burning out, a renewal process must be undertaken where new challenges and fresh perspectives are provided to the teacher.

In the various theories of teacher development, the actual development process involves a teacher solving certain fears and crises in order to develop (Dubble, 1998; Fuller, 1969; Katz, 1972; Watts, 1980). Development in the theories of Burden (1982) and Christensen et al. (1983) offer a different version of this development. Both Burden and Christensen et al. theorized that development came through changes in a teacher’s job skills, knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, outlooks, and job events. The idea was that as they mastered these areas or acquired new perspectives from them, a developmental shift occurred. Each new stage is built off of the experiences and the quality of those experiences in the earlier developmental stages (Dubble, 1998). Watts (1980) suggests that “any teacher can ‘get stuck’ at a given stage for a time, and some teachers can get stuck indefinitely” (p. 6). This is due in large part to the fact that teacher development theories suggest that movement is not a linear process. According to teacher development theories, teachers will move up and down the developmental spectrum depending on situations and experiences they encounter during their careers (Burke et al, 1984; McDonnell et al., 1989; Watts, 1980). Examples of the situations or experiences that might move a teacher back down on the developmental spectrum are moves to new schools, moves to new grade levels or content areas, as well as career crises.

The role of systems in development
Bronfenbrenner (1979) theorized that individuals do not stand alone in their development, but rather their development is impacted by the environmental systems that surround them. His biocological systems theory suggests that “human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects, symbols in its immediate external environment” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996). Individuals are nested within a series of systems that they are in constant interaction with. This interaction causes the individual to impact the systems while the systems conversely impact their development.

For Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1979) the individual interacts with surrounding systems in their developmental process are the ‘microsystem,’ ‘mesosystem,’ ‘exosystem,’ and ‘macrosystem.’ In the life of a teacher, the microsystem would be the immediate family members in a home setting, the mesosystem would be the school where they work at, the exosystem would be the school district the school is located in, and the macrosystem would be the entire national education system. Bronfenbrenner and Evans (2000) termed this interaction between the individual and the environment as a ‘proximal process’ which they define as a “transfer of energy between the developing human being and the persons, objects, and symbols in the
immediate environment” (p. 118). The interaction between the individual and the systems
surrounding the individual impacts the individual’s developmental process.

The role of systems theory receives a similar importance in the work of Burke et al. (1984), who
hypothesized that the career cycle of a teacher is impacted by both the personal environment and
the organizational environment. According to Burke et al., the factors in a teacher’s personal
environment are individual dispositions, family, positive critical incidents, crises, and cumulative
experiences. The factors of the organizational environment that have an impact on teacher
development are regulations, management style, public trust, social expectations, and
professional organizations. Similar to Bronfenbrenner’s theory (1977, 1979), Burke et al.
thorized that the teacher influences the personal and organizational environments while these
environments simultaneously influence the teacher’s development. Bandura (2000) also points
out the interaction between an individual and his or her environment as he writes that “people are
partly the products of their environments, but by selecting, creating, and transforming their
environmental circumstances they are producers of environments as well” (p. 75). According to
these theories, when looking at the development of adults – in this case the professional
development of teachers – it is essential to examine the interaction between the surrounding
environments and the individual, for an individual learner does not stand alone in his or her
development.

**Addressing differences in adult learning processes**

In addition to differences in the developmental levels of teachers, there are also differences in
their roles as adult learners in the professional development process. As Merriam et al. (2007)
writes, “just as there is no single theory that explains all of human learning, there is no single
theory of adult learning” (p. 83). Teachers as adult learners are diverse, each representing an
individual set of learning needs and processes (Cranton & King, 2003; Daley, 2003; Grow, 1994;
Lawler, 2003; Merriam et al., 2007; Quick et al., 2009; Trotter, 2006). As Grow (1994) points
out, “there is no one way to teach or learn well… different styles work for different learners in
different situations” (p. 113). To further illustrate this point, Chickering (2006) argues that
processes of adult learning need to “recognize, respect, and respond to the wide-ranging
individual differences among our diverse learners” (p. 11). Despite the individual needs and
learning processes of adult learners, professional development for teachers is often not linked to
the ways in which adults learn (Cranton & King, 2003; Daley, 2003; Lieberman, 1995).

Whereas teachers are well-versed in the pedagogy of differentiation for their students’ learning
processes, scant attention is paid to what Knowles (1978) termed as “andragogy,” or the ways in
which adults learn.

Knowles (1978) shares that for many decades the belief system surrounding adult learning was
based on the ways in which children learned. According to Knowles, early theorists on adult
learning had “theories about the ends of adult education but none about the means of adult
learning” (p. 27). He considered andragogy to be “a unified theory of adult learning” (p. 48),
based on four assumptions that would change the way in which adult learning processes were
addressed. The first assumption is based on ‘changes in self-concept’ which meant the learner
was moving from a state of dependency to “one of increasing self-directedness” (p. 55). This
concept was in direct opposition to the dependent states of learning in childhood. Knowles’
second assumption is based on ‘the role of experience’ in that an adult learner “accumulates an
expanding reservoir of experience that causes him to become an increasingly rich resource for learning, and at the same provides him with a broadening base to which to relate new learning” (p. 56). The third assumption is based on the ‘readiness to learn’ which suggests that an adult learner will be motivated to learn based on what he or she needs in order to perform successfully in life. Knowles’ final assumption is based on an adult learner’s ‘orientation to learning’ in that adult learners “tend to have a problem-centered orientation to learning” (p. 58) as opposed to the propensity of subject-centered learning that takes place in childhood.

Based largely on the early work of Knowles (1978), a vast amount of literature addresses the current state of adult learning processes. As a leading voice on adult learning processes, Merriam et al. (2007) have found five main approaches to adult learning that address the individual learning processes of adults. These learning approaches are ‘behaviorist,’ ‘cognitivist,’ ‘humanist,’ ‘social cognitivist,’ and ‘constructivist.’ The behaviorist approach centers on the acts of reinforcing good behavior and changing bad behavior and is most commonly found in organizations where evaluation is based on quantifiable measures (Akdere & Conceiaocao, 2006). This approach is accomplished through a process where “the external environment can be arranged to produce behavioral change through the use of reinforcements that reward learners for what the teacher wants them to continue doing” (Daley, 2003, p. 24). According to Merriam et al., the behaviorist approach is the most widely used approach in education as it is the preferred method used to teach the skills, techniques, and instructional strategies that teachers use in the classroom.

Whereas the behaviorist approach focuses on behaviors, the cognitivist approach focuses on the cognitive development of the learner. In this approach, “learning involves the reorganization of experiences in order to make sense of stimuli from the environment” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 285). It focuses entirely on the cognitive growth of the learner, but fails to address other aspects of the self. The cognitivist approach can be found in the professional development of teachers through the teaching of content knowledge. The thought process behind the use of this approach in the professional development of teachers is that the more the teacher knows about the content he or she is teaching, the more effective his or her teaching will be.

Both the behaviorist and cognitivist approaches deserve placement in professional development practices. This is due to the fact that they provide opportunities to develop instructional practice skills and knowledge necessary for a teacher’s development. This form of professional development is highly valuable for teachers in the survival stages of development, but does not support the needs of teachers at higher developmental levels (Burden, 1982; Burke et al., 1984; Katz, 1972; Watts, 1980). Cranton and King (2003) argue that professional development cannot just be about learning new skills, but “it must involve educators as whole persons – their values, beliefs, and assumptions about teaching and their ways of seeing the world” (p. 33). Teachers at higher levels of development are already competent in the basic survival needs, and are in search of learning towards a greater impact and mastery of the profession. This reliance on the behaviorist and cognitivist approaches that do not address teacher needs at higher developmental levels is one of the major inhibitors in the development of teachers. Rogers (1974) theorizes: “there should be a place for learning by the whole person, with feelings and ideas merged” (p. 103). Out of his work emerged the humanist approach, which centers on the idea that the learner controls their own growth potential and can address their own needs in the learning process.
(Merriam et al., 2007). Instead of focusing merely on new skills and behaviors to acquire, the humanist approach provides space for learning by the entire being.

The social cognitivist approach differs greatly from the humanist approach as it factors in both the environment and the individual learner in the learning process. In the social cognitivist approach, knowledge is built out of the interaction between the individual and the surrounding environment (Merriam et al., 2007). The social cognitivist approach places emphasis on “how a person learns a particular set of knowledge and skills, and the situation in which a person learns, become a fundamental part of what is learned” (Putnam & Borko, 2000, p. 4). Social interaction, observational learning, and social modeling are keys to the social cognitivist approach (Bandura, 2002). Bandura (2000) suggests that the adult learner in this approach is aided through three forms of agency: personal (learner alone), proxy (instructor to learner), and collective (social environment). Bandura (2000) elucidates that although personal agency is seen as an effective means to development, it is limited because individuals cannot control the environment that surrounds them and thus there is a need for interaction with the collective.

The final approach used in adult learning for Merriam et al. (2007) is constructivism. This approach involves a process where “learners make new knowledge meaningful by linking it to previous experience and their changing environment” (Daley, 2003, p. 25). Thus knowledge is constructed through the internalization of experiences in the environment that help to rearrange and reassess previous knowledge in the individual. Vygotsky’s (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development takes the constructivist approach one step farther by incorporating the social aspect of learning into it.

Although Vygotsky’s work dealt entirely with the cognitive development of children, the theory behind his work can be applied to adult learning (Eun, 2008). Vygotsky (1978) is best known for his ‘zone of proximal development’ which is “the distance between the actual level of development as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). The key to the zone was to provide learning that was neither too easy nor too difficult for the learner, but central to this learning process was that the learning occurred in the interaction between the learner and the person providing guidance. Eun (2008) argues that by focusing adult learning in the zone of proximal development:

_not only does the less competent participant reach his or her potential development with the assistance of the more competent participant, but the latter also changes in his or her interactions with the former within the [zone of proximal development]. (p. 142)_

The interactions offer the opportunity for the adult to build off of previous knowledge – hence, the constructiveness nature of this learning. This form of adult learning builds the development of the teacher through collaborative work with other learners and the integration of their own previous experiences, skills, and knowledge.
Future Implications
This article examined the literature on human development, teacher development, and adult learning processes with a focus on developing a better understanding of why professional development needs to be individualized and differentiated. With this better understanding, school leaders have a foundation for making a difference in the lives of their students by effectively implementing professional development for educators.

REFERENCES


