



Professional Development for Academic Advisors:

Re-Framing the Conversation to Include Informal Learning

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Session Overview/ Learning Objectives

1. To become more knowledgeable regarding informal modes of learning
2. To become more familiar with basic adult learning theories and models
3. To learn immediate applications for the workplace
4. To discuss and share best practices

What is Professional Development?

- Initial training
 - Entering the profession of advising
 - Taking a new advising position
- Ongoing skill development/maintenance

Overview of Professional Development for Advisors

- Current research suggests that quality advising plays a critical role in student retention (Campbell & Nutt, 2008; Light, 2001)
- BUT existing research focuses on describing advising structures/procedures, often with a focus on student satisfaction
- Research which touches upon training/development tends to rely upon only formal and nonformal modes of learning (Lynch, 2002; Sofranko, 2004)

Modes of Learning

(Merriam, Caffarella & Baumgartner, 2007)

- **Formal** – Institutionalized and driven by a curriculum (e.g. higher education, certification)
- **Nonformal** – Not institutionalized by driven by a curriculum (e.g. seminars, professional conferences)
- **Informal** – Not institutionalized and without a curriculum (e.g. experiential, self-directed)

What is Adult Learning?

A variety of models and theories are available for describing the process by which adults acquire knowledge, such as:

- **Andragogy** (Knowles, 1990)
- **Self-Directed Learning** (Tough, 1971)
- **Experiential Learning** (Kolb, 1984)
 - **Communities of Practice** (Lave & Wenger, 1991)
 - **Mentoring** (Hansman, 2001)

2012 Research Study

- Qualitative study of six advising professionals (focusing on professional advising staff at urban institutions)
- Participants were asked to identify “critical incidents” in their initial training and ongoing professional development
- Participants described mostly informal learning experiences and/or addressed shortcomings of formal/nonformal experiences

Research Findings/Themes

- Knowledge of advising theory alone cannot fully prepare you to be an advisor – experience is necessary!
- Nonformal learning experiences often lead to frustration – one size does not fit all!
- Advisors have a “certain something” inherent in their personalities – can it actually be learned?

Research Findings/Themes

(continued)

- Self-Directed Learning
- Experiential Learning
 - Using personal experience
 - Using professional experience
 - Using communities of practice (i.e. the experience of others in the group)
 - Using mentorship (i.e. the experience of a particular person in the group)
 - Experiential Learning

Discussion Question #1

- What do our own experiences with training and professional development look like?
 - What types of activities were included? Using the “lingo” of adult learning theories, did we utilize experiential learning? Self-directed learning?

Discussion Question #2:

- Does not attending a conference/workshop/seminar = not participating in professional development?
 - Current research leans toward this conclusion
 - How can we, as practitioners, highlight our informal activities? How can we demonstrate that informal learning is just as (if not more so) effective?
 - What questions should be asked of practitioners?

Discussion Question #3:

- Moving forward, how can we incorporate informal modes of learning in our own workplaces?
 - How can we re-imagine our training processes?
 - Less “studying”, more doing/observing
 - How do we encourage self-directed learning
 - Advisors need adequate time/realistic caseloads
 - How do we cultivate a community of practice or a culture of mentorship
 - Advisors need to have physical proximity and adequate time/realistic caseloads

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