An Exploratory Examination of High-Quality, Sustained Adult Education   
Professional Development as it Affects Adult Learner Achievement in Reading, Mathematics and English Language Acquisition

Abstract

The research project is being proposed to the Institute of Education Sciences in response to the Education Research Grants program, CFDA 84.305A, and is submitted under the Exploration goal and the Adult Education research topic by The Education Institute (TEI), an entity of the College of Education at Texas State University. This study proposes an exploration of the relationships of high-quality, sustained professional development to student achievement in reading, mathematics and English language acquisition in adult education through both secondary data analysis and primary data analyses. TEI will examine existing mediators and moderators of adult education professional development interventions that are sustained over time and meet high-quality criteria. The proposal includes exploration of the malleable factors (e.g., professional development programming, instructional practice, local program policy) that are associated with better student outcomes.

The purpose and ultimate utility of the exploratory study will be invaluable for the construction of a standards-based What Works model for adult education professional development based on empirical research. The ultimate model will provide adult education leadership nationwide a developmental tool for prioritizing types of professional development in reading, math and English acquisition to be offered at the state and local levels. While the exploratory research will be conducted in Texas, results should generalize to numerous other states with similar adult education populations and program characteristics: a large English language learner (ELL) population, limited funding, and a primarily part-time teacher work force.

The research will incorporate a secondary data analysis of an existing statewide data set and an original qualitative data collection. The secondary data analysis will examine the achievement of adult learners in Texas using the Texas Educating Adults Management System (TEAMS) database which contains quantitative data at the state level on individual student performance. This analysis will examine adult student performance and its statistical relationship to each teacher’s professional development activities by type and length of professional development as well as other profile data (e.g., part-time, fulltime; length of employment in adult education). In addition to the TEAMS data analysis, qualitative and quantitative data on teacher professional development leading to the Texas Adult Education Teacher Credential as maintained in the Credential Information Tracking System (CredITS) database will be analyzed.

An original and qualitative data collection will also be conducted and analyzed. The purpose of this data collection is to provide a more complete picture of how professional development is implemented by practicing adult education teachers. How teachers regard the professional development’s utility and ease of use, their concerns about putting the learning into practice and their plans for using the learning are all dimensions to be investigated. This study will draw primary data from a selected sample of adult education students, teachers and administrators from each geographic region of the state chosen from a representative balance of urban, suburban, and rural programs.